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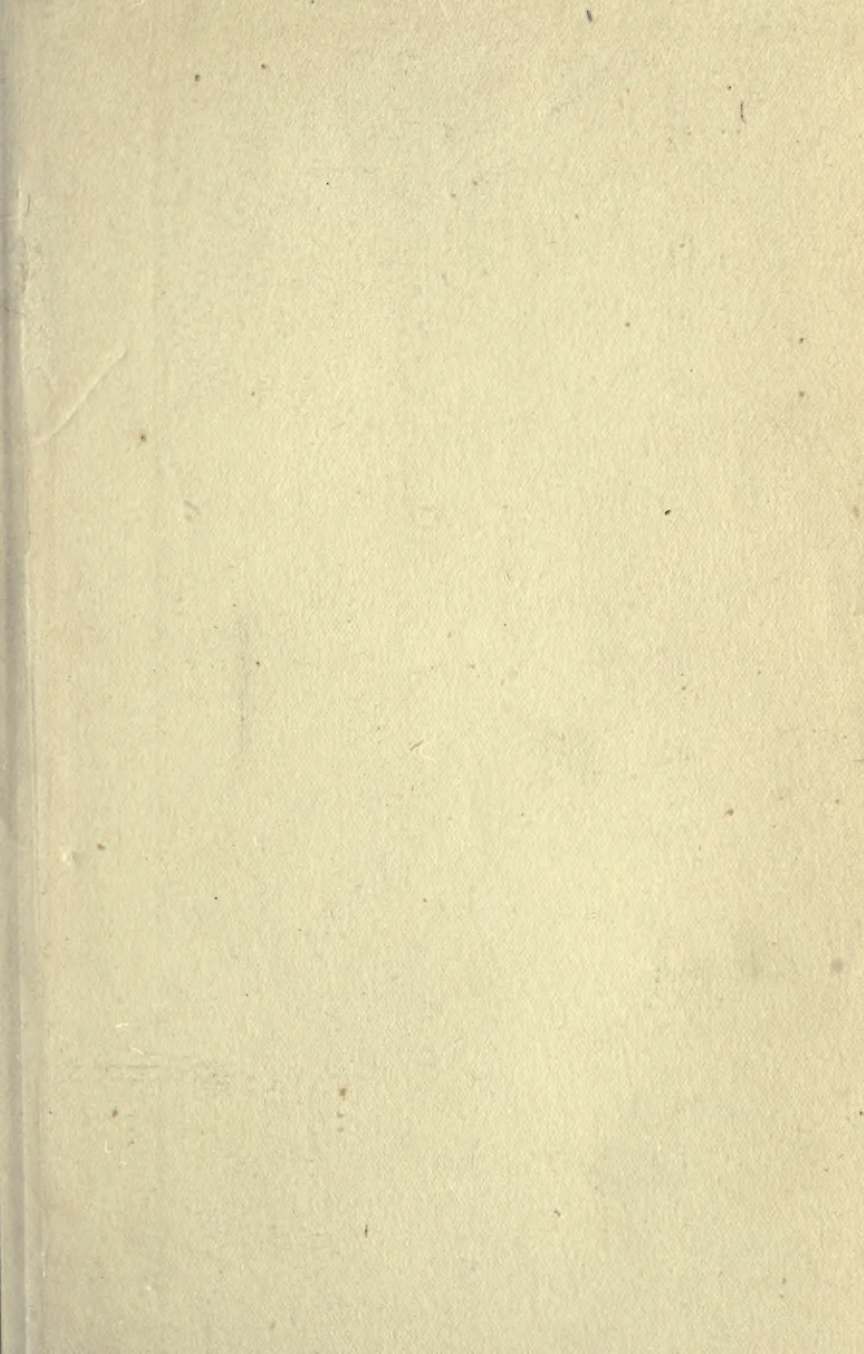
# A GUEST of the KAISER


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By Sergeant  
ARTHUR GIBBONS



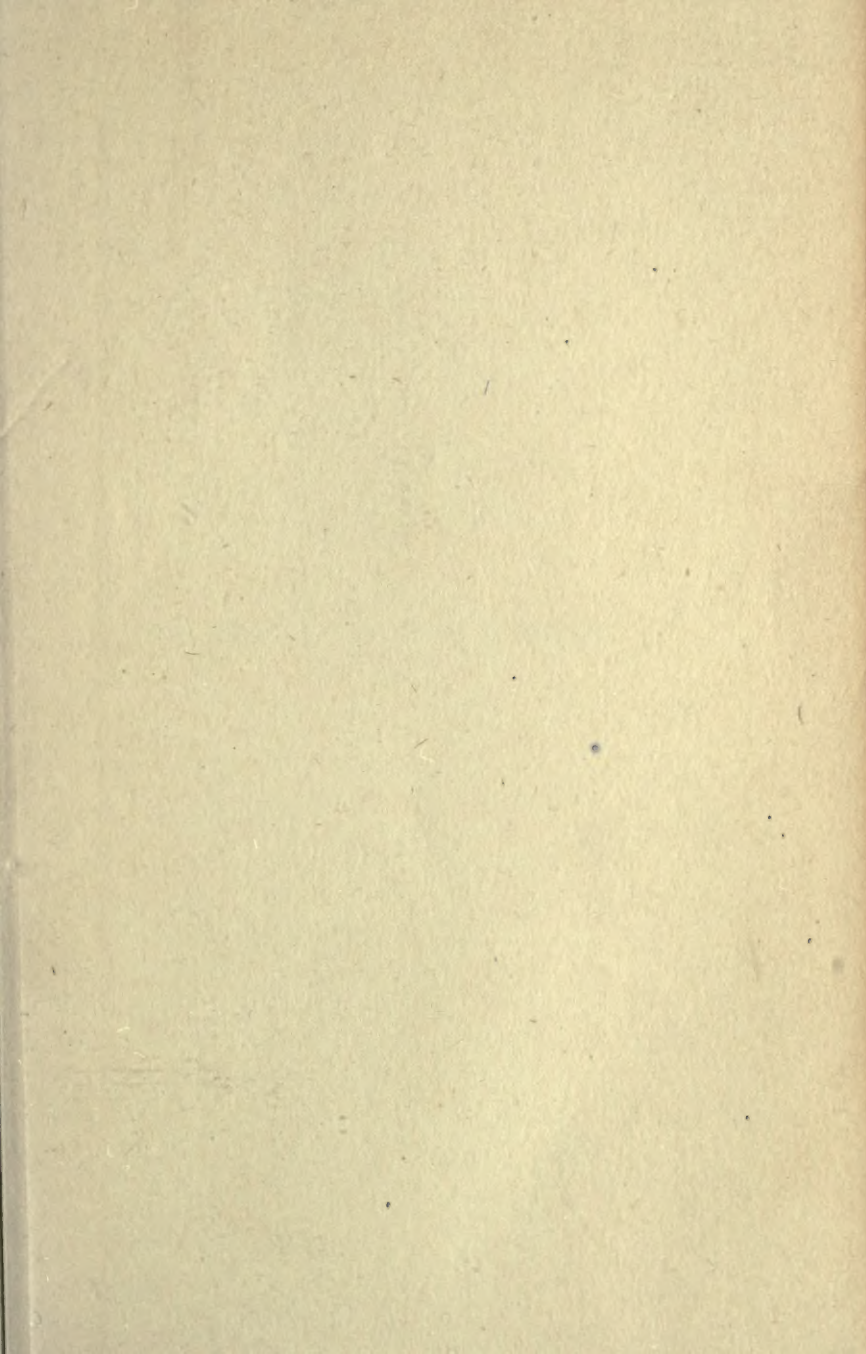


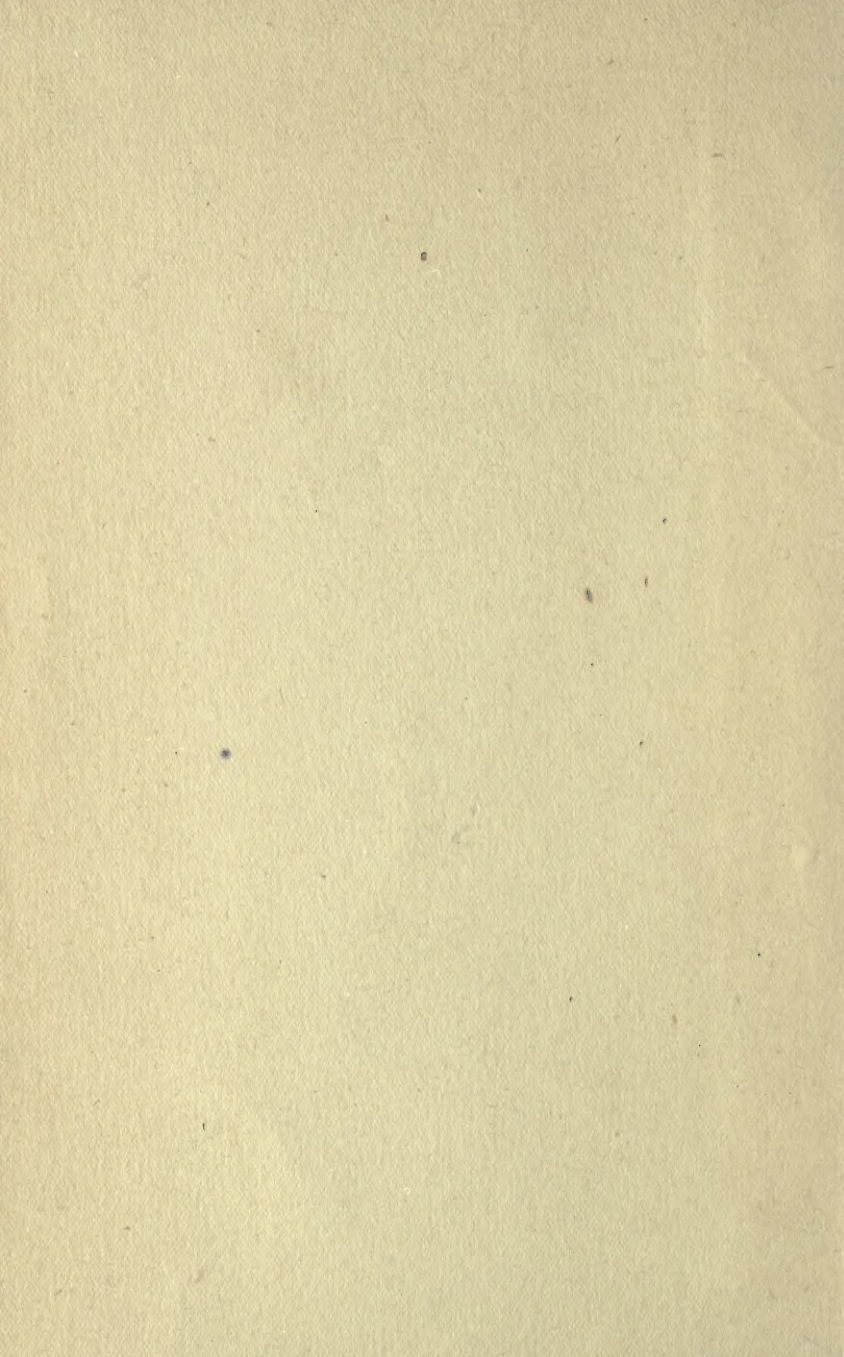




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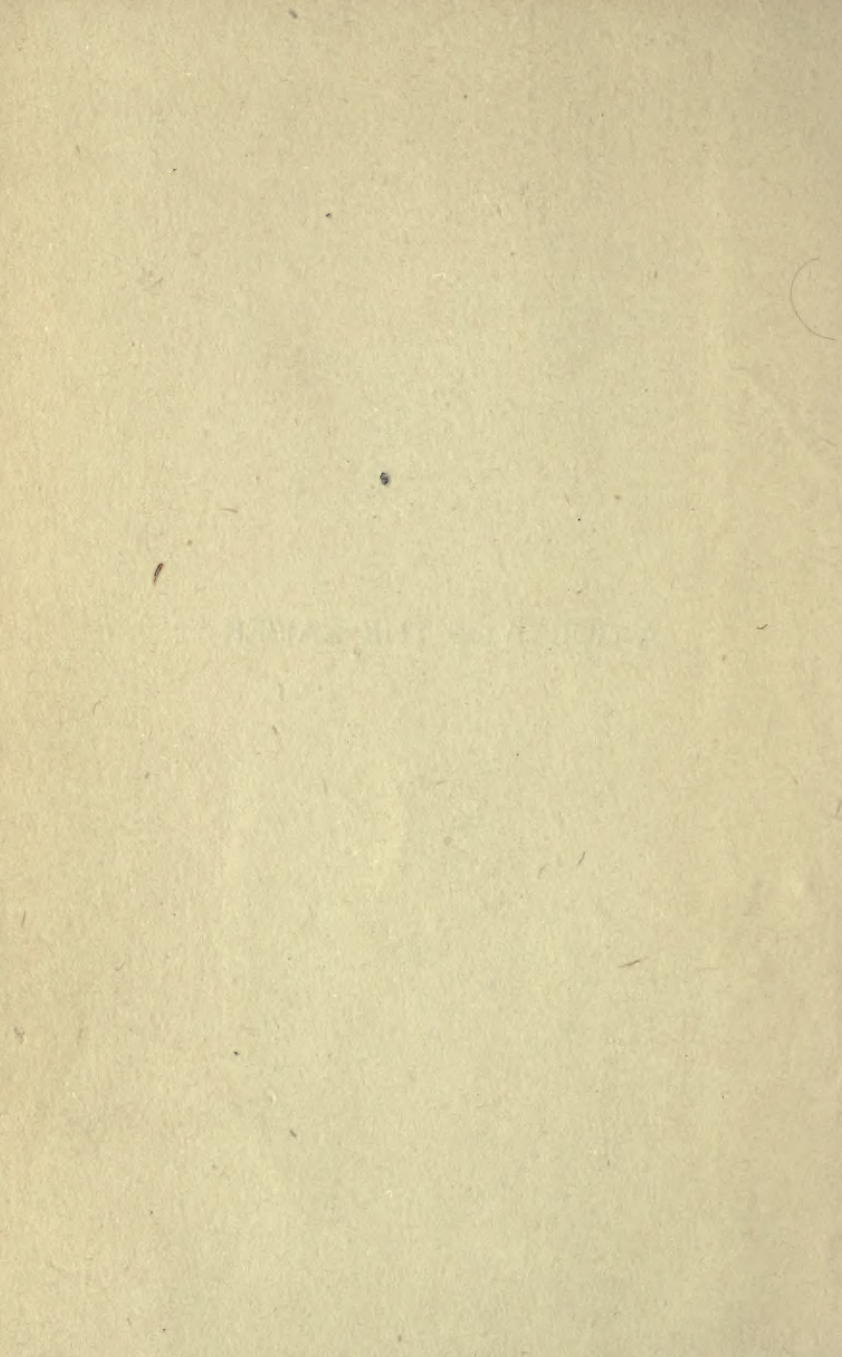






A GUEST OF THE KAISER





# A GUEST OF THE KAISER

The Plain Story of a Lucky Soldier

By

SERGEANT ARTHUR GIBBONS

///  
Toronto Regiment, 1st C.E.F.  
Returned Prisoner of War



Toronto

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**Dedicated to My Dear Brother**

**PRIVATE DAVID GIBBONS**

**26th Canadian Infantry, New Brunswick Regiment**

**Killed in Action at Lens**

**July 4th, 1917**



# A GUEST OF THE KAISER

THE PLAIN STORY  
OF A LUCKY SOLDIER

By  
SERGEANT ARTHUR GIBBONS

Toronto Regiment, 1st C.E.F.  
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## FOREWORD.

Upon my return to Canada from the prison camp in Germany, I was repeatedly urged by my friends to enter the field as a lecturer to inform the ones who were forced to stay "back home" of conditions as they existed at the Front, and behind the lines in Germany.

Previous to the war I had never made a public speech in my life. I was only a boy, just eighteen, and my object in life seemed to be to enter into as many athletic sports as possible. Therefore, when it was first suggested that I become a lecturer, I was terrified at the prospect and would much rather have gone "Over the Top" in an attack than face an audience. I did not make myself into a lecturer; I was just "wished" on to the public platform. My first month on tour was one continual round of terror and stage-fright. How I survived, or what I said in my lectures, I do not know.

The authorities, however, seemed to be pleased with my efforts and soon I was placed on the staff of the Recruiting Committee for Ontario.

In five months I recruited over twelve hundred men for the Canadian Expeditionary Forces. During the same period my lectures inspired many of the people at home to form a number of societies for sending relief to the boys who were still suffering in German prison camps.

Later, when the United States came into the war I was sent across the border to lecture for various patriotic causes. I have been on the staff of the National Council of Defence, the Red Cross Society, the Military Y.M.C.A., the Munitions Board and on various Chautauqua circuits. During two of the Liberty Loan campaigns I had the good fortune to be instrumental in selling more than seven million dollars worth of Liberty Bonds. I am told that I have raised half a million dollars for the Red Cross and about two hundred thousand dollars for the Y.M.C.A. military funds.

On my various lecture tours I have been from coast to coast, both in the United States and in Canada, and at the time of writing am still "carrying on."

Practically every day since I commenced lecturing, I have been urged to put in the form of a book the story of my experiences while "Over There." At last it is done. I have written the



story and told of incidents as they happened to me. The narrative is, therefore, one of my own personal experiences. Many times I have longed to tell the story not only of my experiences in the war, but also those of my two brothers. There were three of us, I being the eldest. When the war began my two brothers were aged respectively fifteen and seventeen. All three of us were under the age limit for military service, yet we determined to get to the Front. We all three managed to do so. David, the second boy, and myself, said that we were nineteen and after some little trouble were accepted.

David was killed in action at the age of twenty, during the storming of Lens by the Canadian troops on July 4th, 1917.

Albert, the third boy, being only fifteen, was not allowed to join the army, so he "attached" himself by the simple method of stowing himself away on board one of the transports that carried Canadian troops to Europe. Eventually he reached the Front and saw plenty of hard fighting. He is, at the time of writing, just nineteen years of age, yet he now wears chevrons on his uniform indicating that he has been four years on active service.

Having read many of the various war books that have been published since the outbreak of the war, I feel that my efforts, here set forth, are indeed poor, but if my reader can find something new and interesting in my narrative, and if the many friends that I had the pleasure of meeting while on my lecture tours, who really inspired this effort, will only look upon my work with a kindly eye, I shall feel that, after all, this book has not been written in vain.

A. G.

TORONTO, December 1st, 1918.

## CHAPTER I

## GETTING INTO IT





## CHAPTER I

### GETTING INTO IT

#### I

"ENGLAND HAS DECLARED WAR!"

#### II

The news went from mouth to mouth, from desk to desk; clerical duties were forgotten.

At first the news seemed to stun us all. Then the reaction came, and all one could hear through the office was: "Will Canada send troops?" "I wonder if we shall get a chance to fight?" "Will the 'Queen's Own' be called out?" and such remarks.

I was working at the time in the office of the Toronto Electric Light Company. Most of the male members of the staff were members of the Queen's Own Rifles—the crack militia regiment of Toronto. Upon several occasions I had tried to join the Q.O.R., but had been turned down as under age and because I was not tall enough.

I had always envied the fellows in the militia, and my ears burned when they talked of the doings of the regiment.

### III

Then the war came. If I had envied the military fellows before, envy did not now describe my feelings. A day or two went by with the excitement at fever heat, and at last it was announced officially that a contingent of volunteer troops was to be sent across the ocean to the aid of the Motherland. The militia regiments issued orders for all members to report for physical examination and to state whether they wished to go on active service or not. The morning after (I believe it was August 8th, 1914) I watched with a heavy heart the boys come into the office. In would rush one or another, his face covered with smiles, and announce proudly that he had been accepted and had passed the examination.

Occasionally one would come in slowly and, in a very dejected tone, say that he had been rejected. More than half of the male staff had signed for active service by this time, and as each new one told the glad news of his acceptance my

spirits drooped lower and lower. There were three of us in the office who had become great chums—Jim McCreery, Slim Berrill and myself. Jim was a big, young Irishman, Berrill a very slim Englishman, and I a very small Canadian. I was eighteen years of age and just five feet four tall when the war broke out, so I thought there was not an earthly chance of my being accepted for overseas service as a soldier. McCreery and Berrill were not members of the militia, but they decided that they would try to enlist.

Just before the office closed that day, they came to me and Jim said, "Well, Art, we are going to try our luck to-night; do you want to come along?"

"Aw, what's the use?" I replied. "They will never take me."

However, I decided I would go along, and I remarked to Berrill: "Gee! if they take you with that chest, they will be tickled to death to get me, even if I am not a beanpole." (Berrill was so slim that none of us thought he had a chance of being accepted.)

That night the three of us went to the Armouries where the Queen's Own were taking recruits. In going through the main hall we

## 6      A GUEST OF THE KAISER

passed several of the boys, who were formerly employed in the office, rigged out in their uniforms and drilling. To us they looked like generals. "Oh, if we could only be like them!" we thought. Then we reached the recruiting office. Will I ever be able to describe the feelings I had at that moment? I think not! There were several hundred men waiting and they were formed up in two lines leading into the office. We wondered what the two lines were for, but we were not left long in doubt. A big sergeant (his breast fairly covered with campaign ribbons) shouted out: "Men for home service in this line," indicating the left, and then "men for active service in this line," pointing to the right. We made a rush for the line on the right, but had no sooner secured a place than the sergeant announced "only men who have served in the Imperial Army will be accepted for active service." Again the feeling that I was not wanted came over me and, with Berrill, I began to get out of the line. Jimmy McCreery, however, grabbed us by the arms and pulled both back. "Wait a minute, you two," he said. "Stick to me and bluff it out. Tell 'em you've served in any regiment that comes to your mind." Berrill



and I had our doubts as to whether this plan would succeed and we did not hesitate to say so. However, Jimmy was firm and kept us in the line until we at last reached the door of the recruiting office. Another sergeant was there and we had to announce to him the service we had seen before he would let us in. We pushed McCreery ahead of us and he walked boldly up to the sergeant and announced, "Three years, Dublin Fusiliers." He was admitted without a word. Berrill came next. I could see he was nervous, but he was a hero compared with myself, as I was scared stiff. "Well, where did you serve, me lad?" the sergeant boomed out. "Er-er, two years. Er-er, Bedfordshire Yeomanry," Berrill replied. I believe the sergeant suspected him but he was admitted. I moved up quickly and shot at the sergeant, "Two years, same regiment, Bedfordshire Yeomanry," and before the sergeant had recovered from the surprise, I was inside the door. I expected him to follow and drag me out, but I guess he took pity on me and felt sure that I would never get through the examination. He was right! The office was jammed with men waiting to be examined, and when at last I got near Berrill, I gasped, "Why

the devil did you pick out such a regiment? Gee! if they ask me anything about the Bedfordshire Yeomanry I am stuck, sure! I never heard of them before."

Berrill had given the name of the first regiment that entered his head. It appeared that he had at one time seen the Bedfordshire Yeomanry in England and so he thought of them.

Jimmy and Berrill stuck to their story of having served in the Imperial Army and were accepted, but when it came my turn, I was told to go and join the Boy Scouts. I left the Armouries that night in a most depressed frame of mind. There were my two chums accepted for service abroad and I was to be left at home. How I managed to live through the next day at the office I don't know, but night came at last and I decided to accompany Jimmy to the Armouries once more to watch the boys drill. We had been at the Armouries some time when a squad of recruits went past in charge of a sergeant of the Medical Corps. Jimmy grabbed my arm. "There is your chance," he said in an excited voice. "Go and see if the Body-Snatchers (Medical Corps) will take you." I thought it was no use, but I decided to take

another chance. I overtook the Medical Corps sergeant and asked him if he were taking recruits. "Yes," he replied, "but I don't think you can get in." He invited me to follow him, however, and see the officer in charge. I did so, thinking that it was another forlorn hope. Jimmy came along but was forced to wait outside the office. I was first questioned and then received my physical examination. The doctor was an old man and he did not notice that I was standing on my toes when he took my height. I was accepted and duly sworn in for service abroad with the Medical Corps. I rushed out of that office and grabbed Jimmy by the shoulders and yelled, "Jim! Jim! They took me at last."

#### IV

We were sent into barracks in Toronto a few days later, and we stayed there about a week being outfitted and equipped. However, I did not like the corps to which I belonged, as I felt that I had what we called at that time "a safety first job." Therefore, when at the end of a week the Queen's Own Rifles sent out a call for more recruits and we were given a chance to transfer from the Medical Corps to the infantry, I was

one of the first to step forward and apply for a transfer. I had two reasons for this: one was that I wanted to be along with my friends; the other, that I wanted to be one of the fighting men, as the infantry were then termed.

We left for the mobilization camp towards the latter part of August, 1914. By this time I was a fully fledged member of the Q.O.R. About a week before the First Canadian Division sailed for overseas the process known as "weeding out" began. Every regiment had entered the camp with several hundred men over the number called for and the surplus over "War Strength" was to be weeded out to be sent overseas later as the Second Division.

I was one of the first ones weeded out from the Queen's Own Rifles and was told that I should be transferred to one of the regiments forming part of the Second Contingent.

This did not suit me at all as most of us believed that there was a possibility of the war being over before even the first troops from Canada got across, and none of us believed that there would ever be a second contingent.

We realize to-day, as we look back, how wrong our ideas were at that time.



I, therefore, promptly went and joined the 5th Royal Highlanders, Canadian Black Watch. I was only a member of that regiment for a day and a half when I was weeded out again.

This ill-luck continued for some time. In less than a week I joined and was kicked out of no less than six of the first contingent regiments. However, two days before we started for overseas, I was securely linked up with the Victoria Rifles and felt sure that, after all, I should be with the first troops to leave Canada. That afternoon I visited the camp of the Queen's Own and saw the captain of my old company. In the course of our conversation I said to him, "Well, you turned me down, but I am going across after all." "Glad to hear it," he said. "But to what regiment do you belong?" "The Victoria Rifles," I proudly answered. "But they are from Montreal," he replied. "Why not go with a Toronto regiment?" Then I told him the story of how I had tried to go with my friends and stay in the Q.O.R., but had been turned down. The captain was very sympathetic and promised to see what he could do to have me re-transferred to the Q.O.R.

He must have been successful, for the next morning I was informed that I was once more a

member of my old regiment. Shortly afterwards we lost our name and identity as the Queen's Own Rifles and became known as the 3rd Overseas Battalion, Toronto Regiment, of the First Canadian Division. The 3rd Battalion was composed of the Queen's Own Rifles, the Royal Grenadiers and the Governor-General's Body Guards, all crack militia regiments from Toronto.

## V

Next day we left for overseas. Will I ever forget that day? How wonderful it seemed that so many of us were on our way to the great adventure. The first Canadian Contingent consisted of thirty-three thousand men, a great number of whom were mere boys, and we sailed from Gaspé Bay, Quebec, one lovely September afternoon. What a wonderful sight it was to see those transports! There were thirty-three in all and we sailed in a formation of three lines, eleven ships in each line. We were convoyed across the ocean by five British battleships. This was the largest Armada that had ever crossed the Atlantic. Our journey across the ocean was uneventful and the weather magnificent.

## VI

Three weeks after leaving Canada we came in sight of the shores of England. It seemed to us as if the whole population of the Mother Country was there to greet us as we drew near the docks. The shore was black with a living mass of people and their cheering and shouting reached us far out in Plymouth Sound. We landed at Davenport. Did we receive a welcome? I don't believe any troops ever received, or ever will receive, such a welcome as that given to the First Canadians on arriving in England. At last we disembarked. As we marched through the streets of Plymouth women and girls rushed into our ranks and, throwing their arms around our necks and kissing us, exclaimed, "Welcome, Canada!" It did our hearts good. Men rushed up to us and filled our kits with good things and gripped our hands and, with tears in their eyes, said how good of us it was to come over to help the Mother Country. For a whole week Plymouth was a regular gala town. Business was almost suspended, and the excuse for it all was, "Well, the Canadians are here."

A little later we entrained and travelled to our training camp at Salisbury Plain. "Salisbury in the mud," "The last place God ever made"; such were the names given to it by all soldiers. Mud! Mud!! Mud!!! We lived in mud, we slept in mud, we literally ate mud, the whole time we were on Salisbury Plain. When I state that during the four months we were there in training hardly a single day passed without a downfall of rain, some slight idea of what it was like can be obtained.

Our battalion, the Third, was placed in the First Brigade. This brigade was composed of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Battalions—all from the Province of Ontario. During the whole of our training period our brigade lived in tents. It speaks well for the boys of the First Brigade to be able to say that they were the only brigade in England who lived under canvas that winter. I feel that it is unnecessary for me to go into detail and describe the manner in which we were trained and the life we lived in camp, as it was much the same as in any of the thousands of camps which have been established since the war started.

We had to learn a great deal and we had to learn it quickly and so, perhaps, we found it a little harder

than the recruits do to-day. We were out from early in the morning till late at night—marching, drilling, digging trenches, fighting sham battles and learning the hundred and one things necessary for us to know before we were ready for the Front. We trained under very severe conditions and were forced to endure a great number of hardships because of our lack of preparation, but in spite of it all we were always cheerful and stuck to the work like heroes, for we wanted to get into shape as soon as possible so that we could get over to the Front and take our place in the fighting line.

## VII

The battalion was formed into four companies, A, B, C and D. Unfortunately most of my friends were detailed to B Company, while I was placed in C. Fighting C is the name we have since earned for ourselves.

Jim McCreery and Slim Berrill were in B Company, therefore we did not see very much of each other except when off duty. However, we used to foregather every Sunday afternoon and play cards or go for a walk, or raise the dickens generally. One Sunday (the day being almost fine,



for a wonder) we decided to go for a walk together. We had no particular place to which to go, but just wandered on hoping to strike a village where we could procure some "good eats."

Now, anyone who has been to Salisbury Plain knows that it is a great, bleak, barren stretch of country—miles long—and it is a simple matter to get lost there. A few miles from our camp was a place about a mile square which had been reserved for artillery target practice. There were a few deserted farmhouses and occasionally the artillery would playfully drop a few shells in the vicinity to give the gunners practice against the time they were to drop their souvenirs on the Huns. We had been warned to keep away from this district and notices had been posted in the camp to the effect that it was being used as an artillery target and was therefore a danger zone. We had gone some miles before we discovered that we were lost. That did not worry us much, however, as we felt sure we should soon meet some soldier or another, who could tell us which direction to take. We were walking along, talking of our best girls, I believe, when we heard "B-o-o-m!" Something whistled over our heads and we heard a crash about two hundred yards away and saw a

cloud of smoke in the air. "Gee whiz!" gasped Jimmy; "look there—the artillery targets." We looked and saw, at the other side of a small wood near by, the farmhouses about which we had been warned. Before we had recovered from the shock we heard another crash and another shell burst; this time it seemed closer than the first. "Good heavens! They are firing shrapnel; what shall we do?" I managed to gasp. (Shrapnel bursts twenty or thirty feet in the air and scatters dozens of small bullets over an area of about twenty feet.) "Run!" yelled Jimmy, suiting the action to the word. Berrill followed him. I yelled after them, "Don't run, you —— fools, you may run right into one."

By this time the shells were screaming overhead every few seconds, but most of them seemed to be going far over our heads before bursting. Jimmy and Berrill turned and ran back to me and we were all three terribly excited. "Let us lie flat on the ground and hope for the best," I whispered. We did so. The shell fire, I now believe, only lasted two or three minutes, and I feel certain that none of the shells burst within a hundred yards of us or near enough to do any damage, but it seemed to us then that it was lasting for hours, and we

felt quite sure that each shell was going to blow us to pieces.

We hugged the ground for a long time after that last echo had died away and then got up and ran like jack-rabbits until forced to drop from utter exhaustion. Then we looked at each other and the reaction came. We laughed outright and told each other what a narrow escape he had had. Finding our way back to camp after such an adventure seemed quite a simple matter, but it took us longer than we had thought. We arrived at last, tired, dirty and worn out. What a story we had to tell the boys, though! Why, we were heroes! Had we not been actually "under fire"? What did we care for the Huns after that? Yes, we were heroes, I don't think! We each got extra drill for being "out of bounds."

## VIII

As time wore on we began to receive short furloughs. What a great time we each had upon our "leave," and what wonderful stories of our various adventures in the cities we had to relate. We realized, though, that before long we should be leaving for the Front. We had been on the

Plain training hard for more than three months when we were informed that on a certain date, not far distant, we were to be given our final inspection by Their Majesties, the King and Queen. That, as we knew, meant that we should soon be fit for service at the Front, as most of the regiments at that time, before embarking for active service, were reviewed by Their Majesties.

The day of the review came. The Division (33,000 strong) was drawn up in mass formation on the Plain. It was a wonderful sight to see those troops. Magnificent men, a splendid example of Canadian battle glory. Cavalry to the left, infantry (with bayonets flashing in the sun) in the centre, and artillery to the right. Their Majesties, accompanied by Viscount Kitchener and several members of the General Staff, passed along the lines, inspecting as they went. I heard the King exclaim, as he passed by: "Splendid! A magnificent body of troops!" Kitchener did not say anything as he passed our company, but we felt that his eyes pierced us through and through. After the inspection we marched past in review order and were again reviewed by Their Majesties and the Staff. Then the special train carrying the royal party pulled out from the siding

and we all lined the tracks for miles and stood waving our caps on our rifles and cheering for all we were worth.

## IX

A short time afterwards, preparations were made for our departure for the Front. We left Salisbury Plain one midnight in a downpour of rain. It seemed as if the weather were giving us a farewell reminder of our stay on the Plain by drenching us at departure. We needed no reminder of this kind to keep the weather conditions of Salisbury Plain in our minds, and I feel sure that not one among us was sorry to say good-bye to the Plain forever. In spite of the rain, however, we were all in the very best of spirits, and so during the memorable march of about sixteen miles we continually sang songs and talked of the things we would do when we reached the Front.

## X

Partly on account of the large number of troops in our division who were to be transported to France, and partly because of the submarine peril, we did not cross the Channel by the usual route (Folkestone or Dover to Calais or Le



Havre), but were sent a roundabout way, via Avonmouth, on the west coast of England, to St. Nazaire, somewhere on the Bay of Biscay. Our battalion sailed on board H.M. Transport *City of Glasgow*. The trip was a terrible experience for us all. We had imagined that it would take us just a few hours to reach France, but, instead, it took us three days. The weather conditions were very bad, so most of us suffered a great deal from sea-sickness. There was no sleeping accommodation at all on board; we were forced to sleep on deck or anywhere else that we possibly could. Frequently when asleep we were drenched to the skin by the waves that dashed overboard. The best sleeping accommodation on that ship was in the stalls, down below, with the horses and mules. Imagine us, then, sleeping on the straw at the horses' feet and taking the chance of having our brains kicked out any minute. The numbers of stalls being limited, the officers and non-coms. soon grabbed most of them for their own use.

## XI

It was on board the *City of Glasgow* that we made the acquaintance of "bully beef" and

"hard tack." (How those words bring back memories!) Bully beef is a concoction of pressed beef that is put up in one pound tins and served to the British Army continually. It is as salty as the devil, therefore hated by the soldier, and, worst feature of all, is labelled "Made in Chicago." The British Tommy swears that the bully beef which was issued during the first year of the war was left over from the stock that was bought during the South African War.

"Hard tack," or army biscuits, are hard biscuits about four inches square and about three-quarters of an inch thick. (It is necessary to use a bayonet or some other weapon to break them.) We believe that the reason that a recruit is required to have good teeth before joining the army, is that he will be able to eat hard tack when on service and on occasion be prevented from starving to death.

Well, bully beef, hard-tack and tea (oh, yes, the British Army lives up to traditions and serves the men tea) were the only rations that we received during the journey, but we managed to survive all right. It seemed as if years had passed since we left England before we came at last in sight of the shores of France. Arrived at St. Nazaire, we all

breathed a big sigh of relief and were greatly pleased when we received orders to disembark.

## XII

Together with about fifty others, I was put on duty helping to unload the boat. The work was very hard and we were all on the look-out for an opportunity to cut and run or be put on some other duty. By this time I had become very friendly with a fellow in my section, by the name of Gamble. He was a regular Cockney (Londoner) and one of the finest pals in the world.

We had been working for some time when Gamble came up to me and said: "Sye, Gibby, how'd yer like ter see ther town?" "Fine," I answered, "but how are we going to do it?" "Well, just put on your equipment, pick up yer rifle as if yer were going on guard and foller me," he said. I did so and we started off. When we reached the end of the dock we were stopped by an officer and asked where we were going. Gamble saluted and said, "Baggage guard, sir," and with that the officer allowed us to pass and we soon found ourselves in the town.

Our next problem was to find some place where we could procure something to eat. We walked

along one of the main thoroughfares looking in vain for a place that in any way resembled a restaurant (we afterwards found out that in France restaurants are not quite so plentiful as in other countries), until we came to a large confectionery store. "Come on in 'ere," Gamble said, suiting the action to the word. I followed him and we found ourselves in a fashionable tea-parlour surrounded by dignified French ladies and their maids and children partaking of afternoon tea. Gamble walked up to the counter and said to one of the ladies there, "Sye, have yer got anythink to eat?" The lady looked at him as if she thought he was insane and it seemed to me as if she were unable to decide whether to run away or stay there. It was no wonder, for there we were, two soldiers in a strange uniform and as dirty and filthy as one could imagine after our trip across the Channel and the work of unloading the boat, demanding something in a strange tongue. The people of St. Nazaire had not seen the British uniform before, as we were the first British soldiers to enter the town. That lady in the store may have heard English spoken before, but I am sure that she had never heard such English as that used by Gamble. We then commenced to

make signs that the people might understand we were hungry and it was not long before we were invited into the rear of the store and were given a fine meal. We also gave the people to understand that we would like to wash and clean up a little, so, best of all, we were shown to a place where we could wash. After our meal and clean-up we went back into the store and there we purchased an enormous amount of chocolate for the rest of the boys. When we came to pay for what we had received, we each handed the lady a gold coin. She could hardly believe her own eyes that soldiers such as we should have so much money in our possession.

### XIII

From incidents such as this, the Canadians earned the name in Europe of "millionaire soldiers." After we had been in France a short time we realized that the news of our wealth had travelled abroad, as we were always charged about double the amount that a British or French soldier would be charged. The French soldier at that time only received as pay the small amount of five cents per day, so when the French people heard



that the Canadians received more than five francs per day they determined to profit by it and, to a certain extent, they did. It was a common thing for a group of Canadians to be approached by a few British soldiers and told that they were to blame for the high prices that they were charged, because, as they said, we gave the French people the impression that every man who wore a khaki uniform had more money than he needed. Shortly afterwards we started back to the docks, but by this time the word had gone around the town that the Canadians had arrived and we were continually stopped by people and congratulated for coming over the ocean to help the Allies. Everyone we met (especially the girls) demanded a souvenir. They were most insistent in their demands. However, we had no souvenirs to give, so we just handed out our cartridges to them. We had started out from the boat with two hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition, but by the time we got back we had not a single round between us. When we arrived at the docks we found the regiment already lined-up, ready to leave, but in the confusion we managed to take our places in the line and found that we had not been missed.

## XIV

Just before marching away we were each issued a goatskin coat to be worn in the trenches and a large pair of leather mittens. These mittens were fastened together with a cord to hang them around our necks. Then we were given more ammunition (the cartridges that Gamble and myself had given away were never missed), which we carried over our shoulders in bandoliers. How we all began to kick then! "Do they think we are all a lot of pack mules? Haven't we got enough to carry as it is?" Such remarks could be heard everywhere. On leaving England our equipment had weighed more than eighty pounds. With the extra things, it now weighed nearly ninety.

One of the greatest hardships with which I had to contend while on service was the carrying of my equipment. As I have said, I am not a big fellow, yet each man has to carry the same load, whether he be big or little, so that in the next few months I cursed the fate many times that made it necessary for a soldier to carry so much equipment while on service. The active service equipment of the British soldier consists of the following: Rifle, bayonet, two hundred and fifty

rounds of ammunition, entrenching-tool, great-coat, blanket, water-proof sheet, helmet, gas-mask, water-bottle, haversack (containing toilet requisites and spare rations), extra clothing and boots and a few other minor things too numerous to mention.

## XV

As we marched through the streets of St. Nazaire on our way to the railroad depot we were cheered and applauded in a vociferous manner by the people who were crowding to see and welcome us. We had thrown our goatskin coats over our shoulders and looked quaint with the white fur showing over the khaki. Therefore, in reply to the cheering of the people we answered with a series of noises resembling goats, such as "baa," "baa!" This seemed to amuse the French people a great deal and they thought that our morale was wonderful since we could be so cheerful and march away to the Front in such great spirits.

At the railroad depot we boarded the "French Pullmans." We noticed that the inscription written in chalk on each car was "forty men or six horses," and we wondered how the dickens forty men could travel in a car of such small

dimensions. We were not left in doubt for long. Instead of putting forty of us in each car they put sixty. The excuse was, that as there were so many of us they were short of cars and we would have to be crowded a little. A little! It was slightly more than a *little*. How we ever got in I don't know, and when we were all in it was impossible for anyone to move without disturbing about a dozen others, and if one of us wanted to sit or lie down, he had to get most of the other inmates of the car to move around to give him room.

At night time we would sit and lie on top of each other in our attempts to snatch a little sleep. We travelled in this manner for three and a half days, right from St. Nazaire, in the south of France, to Hazebrouck, in the north. During the day-time it was not so bad, as we were able to climb out on top of the cars and travel "a la observation car." Three times a day we were issued the eternal bully beef and hard-tack. By this time we had begun to hate the stuff, but as all had healthy appetites, very little was wasted. Whenever the train stopped, however, there was a general rush to purchase any "eats" that were obtainable from the station restaurants or the

vendors who were always near with their little carts. It was amusing to see the boys trying to make themselves understood by the French people, with gestures and motions of the hands. I am certain that most of the French people at that time thought the Canadians were just a little crazy. Anyhow, it seemed that way from the expressions on their faces whenever any of our boys approached them, and the few among us who could speak French were kept very busy interpreting, explaining things and straightening out any little difficulties which would arise between us and the French people. The boys liked to display their various purchases and brag of the bargains they had made. I think that the prize purchase of the entire trip was a large loaf of bread, about three feet long, which one of the boys secured from a passing baker's wagon. That loaf "sure did" cause lots of fun, but none of us hesitated a minute when it came to eating a share.

## XVI

One gruesome incident that left a lasting impression on most of us and made us realize more than anything else had previously done that we were engaged in the business of war and were



not on a glorious picnic after all, occurred while on the journey. We had stopped for a short time at a station in one of the bigger cities, where we noticed a freight train drawn up on a side track with two British Tommies standing near on guard. A few of us went over to talk to these men and in the course of conversation we asked what they were doing and where they had come from. "Oh, we've just come from the Front," one of them said. At once our curiosity was aroused and we asked where they were going. "Aw, just down to the base," was the answer, "What have you got on the train?" one of the boys then asked. "Well, look for yourselves," the Tommy answered. We looked in one of the cars of the train and saw a number of dirty, muddy, blood-stained kits and equipments. "See those kits?" one of the soldiers said; "they belonged to the boys of our regiment; we are the only ones left who came out of the Battle of the Aisne, so they have sent us down to the base with these kits to have them cleaned and fixed up."

That statement seemed to make our blood run cold. Only two men left from the entire regiment after the battle! We looked at our own equipment, all new and clean. We did not say a word,

yet we were all asking the question in our minds how long it would be before our own kits and equipment would be sent down to the base in this same manner. From that time on we knew that we were engaged in something far more serious than a glorious picnic, and that something was WAR.

## XVII

Three days after leaving St. Nazaire we arrived at a place called Meteren, a small village in the northern part of France and about ten miles behind the firing line. We left the train at midnight, again in the pouring rain, cramped from the long journey and as miserable a group of soldiers as one could imagine. The men were all kicking and grumbling profusely at the weather and conditions in general. Then began the march to our billets. A few of the men began to smoke and talk in loud voices, but all that was stopped soon by the captain who came to us and said, "No smoking here, men, and no talking above a whisper—you are now in the enemy's country." We could hear the big guns booming a few miles away, but it seemed to us at that time that they were very close. I do not believe that any of us

would have been a bit surprised if a German regiment had suddenly appeared and attacked us. Our nerves were jumpy and all on edge. It was our first real "close up" experience of the war and it certainly was not a very pleasant one. Afterwards, our fears at that time seemed to be ridiculous, but just then they were real enough.

Eventually, after marching for about three hours through the rain and mud, we reached our billets. We were utterly worn out—tired, exhausted and miserable. Those first billets were wonderful (?) affairs! The battalion had been divided up into groups and a group of men was detailed to each farmhouse and placed in charge of an officer. In the darkness the companies had become separated, so each one of us just joined the passing group and went along to the nearest farmhouse. There were about two hundred men in the group to which I attached myself, and after searching around for about a half an hour for some kind of shelter, we were told to occupy a near by barn. To get into this barn we had to climb a ladder about twenty feet long and drop through an opening. Up the ladder we went and then through the opening from which we jumped into space. We landed in straw and hay. It was

pitch dark and we were falling over each other continually. Still it was some kind of shelter and we were thankful. The barn that we occupied was a dilapidated old structure, with great gaps in the wall through which the rain came and the wind whistled. We were too worn out to care for that or to mind in the least, and a few minutes later most of us were asleep.

### XVIII

Early next morning we were roused out to answer the roll call. Imagine our dismay, when we found that the officer in charge of our billet was one of the worst-hated officers in the whole battalion. He was a young lieutenant who had become known among us by the name of "Sissy" by reason of his immaculate ways and his effeminate manner. In all matters of discipline he was very strict and exacting, and he led the men in his own platoon a regular "dog's life." "Sissy" lined us up outside the billet and after ascertaining that everyone was present, said, "Now, men, you are on active service; discipline will be very strict from this time on. Anyone who disobeys an order is liable to be shot. In half an hour I am going to call you all on parade again and I want

every man to have all the mud and dirt cleaned off his uniform and equipment, and I also want you all to have your buttons shined. Dismiss."

After we were dismissed we just stared at each other for a few minutes unable to say a word; then the realization of the meaning of the orders which we had just received seemed to dawn upon us. "Damn that Sissy!" "Who ever heard of having buttons shined when on service?" "That man must be crazy." "Wants all the mud and dirt cleaned off in half an hour, eh?" "What does he think we are? I'd like to see him do it." Such exclamations could be heard on all sides. We hardly knew what to do. "Sissy" had given us just half an hour to clean our uniforms and to get our buttons shined, yet it would take us hours to do this. He had said that if we disobeyed an order we were liable to be shot. Oh, Gee! How were we to shine our buttons? That seemed to be the eternal question, as we had left all our button shining equipment behind in England. Well, we did the best we could and at the end of the half hour we were all called on parade again. "Sissy" had just commenced his inspection when, to our great relief, the captain arrived. We all knew that the captain would take charge at once and



were pleased, as we were certain that he had no foolish notions about brass buttons being shined while on active service, having himself served as a private in the South African War. The captain did take charge and the inspection of our buttons was never made, luckily for us, as none of us had shined them. Whether "Sissy" was ever told of the mistake that he had made or not I do not know, but I do know that while we were on service we were never again ordered to have bright buttons.

At that time our transport and supply columns and Army Service Corps were far from efficient or well-organized, with the result that we were often left for long intervals without food and supplies. During our first week in France we did not receive any supplies whatsoever from the Quartermaster's Department and would have gone hungry had not one of our officers proved himself a good fellow by purchasing various supplies for us from the French people.

## XIX

We were kept marching and drilling and were given various inspections each day, but from six in the evening until about nine we were allowed to go to the village. I don't think I shall ever

forget that village of Meteren. It was there that I first saw some of the results of the Hun campaign of frightfulness and began to realize the true meaning of German "Kultur." A few weeks before we arrived, the famous Coldstream Guards had succeeded in driving the invading Germans out. Small graveyards, with their significant crosses of wood, bearing upon them the names of gallant soldiers of the Guards who had given their all in helping to drive out the Hun, were all about the place. The people of that village simply worshipped the "Coldstreams" and they would tell us stories of their heroism with tears streaming down their faces. Those people also told us other stories, many of which would seem absolutely unbelievable to the people at home: stories of acts the Germans had performed, which we did not at first believe, but they showed us living proof of what they said. One incident and story I remember particularly well. At the corner of one of the streets of the village stood a small house. Occasionally, in passing, we noticed a man working about the outside of the house. He impressed me as being simple-minded or insane, as he acted in such a queer manner and had such a vacant stare in his eyes. One

day a chum and myself were passing the house when the lady there invited us in to have a cup of coffee. She was very hospitable and did all she could to cheer us up a little. We were invited to call again and next day we did so. Now the lady could talk a little broken English and my friend understood some French, so we could hold a kind of conversation. The subject of the German invasion came up and when we asked the lady what had happened there at that time she was quite overcome and broke down completely. After a while she controlled herself and told us a story of bestial brutality which is quite unfit for print. The demented man in the garden, it appeared, was her husband who had been driven to that state by cruelties and abominations practised on her, while he, nearby, was forced to remain an impotent witness. Confirmation of Bryce's report was here in abundance.

## XX

The regiment had been billeted in and around the village for about a week when orders came for us to move to billets nearer the firing line. Next morning we started out on the most trying march I have ever experienced, from Merris to

Armentières. Mention that route march to any survivor of the original First Canadian Brigade even now, and it has the same effect as the showing of a red rag to a bull. The First Brigade formed up in Merris (the adjoining village) and started out with each man carrying full equipment (over eighty pounds). The distance we had to go was about twenty-three kilometres, and it was over those awful cobblestone roads of Northern France. We, by the way, were wearing the British army boots which had been issued to us just before leaving England. These boots are made of very hard leather. The soles are about half-an-inch thick and studded with heavy nails, while on the heel there is a big clamp like a horseshoe. These same boots are splendid for hard service and trench warfare, but are absolute torture if they are marched in for any distance. During training we had worn the much lighter Canadian shoe, so this was a new and very hard experience for us.

For the first five or six miles we got along splendidly. We sang songs, joked with one another and passed the time of day with the French people who passed. Then one or another began to drop out. We had not the slightest

idea as to our destination or how far we had to go, and as each new village was sighted we felt that it would surely be the billeting-place. But no! We swung along into the villages and out again until we thought it would never end. After having gone about twelve miles, a number of the boys began to be bothered by foot trouble and were forced to drop out. My feet were holding out in great shape, but I was beginning to stagger under the heavy kit. The shoulder-straps of my equipment seemed to be burning right into my body and I was just ready to drop out too when a big corporal, named Matt Foster, who was marching alongside of me, noticed this and with an encouraging smile said: "Buck up, Gibby, stick it out now that you have gone so far." "Sure!" I answered in a weak voice and gave him a sickly look. "Here, give me that — pack," he exclaimed, and with that he pulled off my equipment and slung it over his own shoulders. Was I grateful to him? Well, words can't express my feelings at that moment, but it seemed to me a low down trick to let another fellow carry a double load while I carried none. Afterwards my equipment was passed around among the bigger fellows who were marching



near and I got a kind of rest for at least three miles. At the end of that time I felt much better and managed to carry my equipment to the end of the journey. Several times as we marched through villages the womenfolk would come along with large jugs of beer, coffee or water and hand us a drink as we marched. We appreciated this very much, as we had become hot on the march and most of us had drunk the contents of our water-bottles within an hour of starting, thinking that we had to go only a short distance.

At last we came in sight of Armentières and we felt sure that at last we had reached the end of our journey. This time we were right. As we marched into the town, our company (C) was told off to an old school and informed that it would be billeted there. I think that only about two-thirds of the brigade marched into the city as a unit. The remainder straggled in during the rest of the afternoon and night in small groups. Most of them had been picked up and given a lift by transports and ambulances going in the same direction.

That march had been a terrible experience, but with the usual good spirits of soldiers, we soon forgot all about it. We entered our billet, threw

off our equipment, kicked it around the floor, poured out a few blessings on the Army in general and began to wonder where we could find something to eat.

## XXI

Appetite is one great thing that this war has developed. Soldiers' appetites, no matter what the conditions, whether on the march, in billets, in the trenches, fighting in a big "scrap," or under a terrific fire, are always in evidence, and soldiers are always looking forward to and wondering where they can obtain "eats." We may have been fussy in civilian life, we may have wanted our food just so, and we may have turned up our noses at anything we did not fancy, but on service it did not matter what we were able to procure, whether we liked it or not, it was all right as long as it was "eats."

## XXII

We had been billeted in Armentières for just two days when our turn came to go into the trenches for the first time. We were told to be ready that night as we were to start just after dusk. Our company was to have the honour of

being the first one of the battalion to go into the line.

That afternoon I sat down and wrote farewell letters to all my relatives and friends and placed them in my pocket with a note attached to the effect that they were to be mailed in case I was killed. At that time it seemed impossible to me that I could go into and come out of the trenches alive. (I realize now what foolish notions I then had.) When I came out of the trenches the next night, I tore up the letters as I felt that I was, perhaps, not going to get killed after all.

At dusk we were lined up in the square of the town and we started off. We marched to the outskirts and were there met by a guide—one of the men from the battalion about to be relieved, who was sent to direct the relieving battalion to the right section of trench to be occupied. On and on we marched until we came within range of the German star shells or flares. Then we were formed into single file and marched forward in that manner, each man a distance of three feet from the man ahead. We then struck out across the fields in the direction of the trenches. We were naturally very excited, but I do not think any of us was as nervous as we had expected to

be. The reason for this was that just before starting out one of our officers had said, "Well, men, don't be afraid; you will be far from the enemy; we are going to put you into the reserve trenches."

Reserve trenches, Gee! We had not known that such things existed. (We were right, for in those days there were practically no reserve trenches). Just the same, the mere fact that we had been told that we were going into reserve trenches instead of the firing line seemed to give us a new lease on life.

At last we reached the trenches. How we managed it, I do not seem to remember. I have hazy recollections of ploughing my way through fields of slimy mud, wading through small ditches, dropping to the ground or into water-filled shell holes to take cover from German flares, and of being yanked out of the mud on several occasions by Henry Wardell, one of my good chums. At last I was in the line—that was the main thing.

We were placed for instructional purposes in a sector of trench with a number of British Tommies, who were veterans of months of trench warfare. We were only to be in the trenches the first time for twenty-four hours and had been

told to learn all that we possibly could from the Tommies in that time. After what the officer had told us on starting about going into reserve trenches, we expected it would be comparatively safe and quiet, but on the contrary we found that shells passed overhead pretty frequently and bullets seemed to be whizzing past the parapet all the time. Therefore, my first question to the Tommy with whom I had picked up an acquaintance was, "Say! What line of reserve trenches is this?" I could not see the expression on his face, as it was quite dark, but the tone of his voice carried with it withering scorn when he answered, "This is not a reserve trench; this is the Firing Line."

"F-F-Firing Line," I managed to gasp. "Er-Er-How far are the Germans away?" "Aw, just a couple of 'undred yards over there," he replied, and indicated somewhere out in No-man's-land.

"B-B-But they said we were going to be put in reserve," I told him. "Kiddin' yer, I guess, son," he said. "Why, we ain't got no reserve trenches round 'ere!"

The reason dawned on me then why we had been told we were going into reserve. It was so



that we would not have that dread feeling of stage fright about which some of the veterans had told us. "Raw recruits," they had said, "generally feel just a *little* nervous when told that they are going into the line for the first time."

Nervous! Well, I don't wonder. I have not the slightest doubt but that we should have felt *nervous* had we known the true state of affairs. Still, I seemed to think, "Here I am; I am not killed yet; I guess the Canadians can show these Tommies that *they* are not nervous even though they are raw recruits." Were we nervous? Well, I guess most of us were, but we would not have let them see it for anything.

### XXIII

We then began to learn what is meant by "trench warfare," and we found that there were a thousand and one minor details to be learnt and many entirely new duties to perform. It was in sharing our first stay in the trenches with him that we really got to know "Tommy," the British soldier. In my opinion there is no other fighting man in the world who surpasses him. Tommy does not go into action waving flags and

with bands playing. No, he goes into the hardest scrap or to certain death quietly and with a determination to do or die. If he dies, he does it without fuss and nobody ever hears of what he has accomplished. The fact of the matter is, that the British soldier will accomplish wonders in the field and will not advertise.

Tommy never knows when he is beaten. With that bulldog courage of his, he will hang on to a battered down sector of trench in face of certain death, and, with the butt of his eternal cigarette in his mouth, will calmly load and fire his rifle as he prepares for the end. He never gives in. But, apart from his courage and his "never say die" spirit, Tommy is the finest man anyone could wish to have alongside one on service. It is said that he is good-natured and generous, but that hardly explains it. Why, Tommy would give you his last portion of rations or water if he thought you needed it, or half of his last cigarette. He will go out into No-man's-land and risk his life—yes, and give up his life—to save a comrade or even an enemy. "God bless you, Tommy!" You certainly have taught the Canadian boys a wonderful lesson and our hats are off to you all the time.

## XXIV

Our first night in the trenches was spent in a very quiet sector, and not many exciting incidents occurred. We learnt how to man the parapet, to repulse an enemy attack, how to fill sandbags and repair broken parapets, to fix the breakages in the barbed wire entanglements, build dug-outs, bring in the rations, go out to, and hold a listening post position, and the thousand and one other duties which are connected with life in the trenches.

As the night wore on I was relieved from my "sentry duty" and told to get into a dug-out and rest. The dug-out I found to be a small hole, dug into the side of the trench, about three feet long and two feet deep and four feet wide. I crawled in and after squirming around for awhile I began to wonder how the dickens I was ever going to sleep in that damp, dirty little space. I managed to get to sleep at last, however, only to be rudely awakened by someone shouting at the entrance, "Who the —— is in there?" "Gibbons," I answered. "Who the 'ell is Gibbons?" the same voice continued. "Aw! Canadians!" I replied. "Well, move over. There

are three more fellows to get in with you." Great Scott! And I had been wondering how I alone was going to sleep in that space. The three other fellows crawled in, but I am certain that none of us slept very much.

## XXV

One very amusing incident occurred that night which almost caused trouble between the Tommies and ourselves the next day. We in the Canadian Army were armed with the Ross rifle, or, as the boys called it, the "Ross Pea-shooter." To say that the Ross rifle is of absolutely no use at all for active service is to make a very mild statement. The British soldiers, however, were armed with the famous Lee-Enfield rifles and were envied by us on this account. I have seen many of our boys steal Lee-Enfield rifles from the British soldiers and replace them with the Ross. Whenever this was discovered by the officers, the Canadians would be compelled to give up the Lee-Enfield rifle and again use a Ross.

I was not surprised, therefore, when a short time later one of the boys, the chum named Wardell, came to me and said: "Say, Gibbons, they have got Lee-Enfields here and the Germans are not

far away; we can use them; come on out and see how the British rifles work." I crawled out of the dug-out and, together with Wardell, fired a few rounds across No-man's-land with a Lee-Enfield rifle. The night was cold and wet and very soon I returned to the shelter of the dug-out. Wardell, however, went all along the trench and tried out, by firing, every British rifle that he could find. The British Tommies did not like this in the least, as the sector we were holding had been very quiet until the time of our arrival, and little firing had been carried on at night. All along the trench we could hear the Tommies asking, "Who the dickens is getting the wind up?" ("Getting the wind up" is the expression used at the Front to signify that the troops are nervous or excited, indicating to the enemy that raw troops or recruits are in the trenches.) The answer that they usually received was to the effect that it was just one or another of the "mad Canadians." The excitement, however, was simply due to our friend Wardell, firing off every rifle in the trench. This continued throughout the night, so that after a time the Tommies took no further notice and just attributed it to our over-zealousness.



It was next morning at "Stand to" that the fun started. ("Stand to" is the time between dawn and daylight, when every man in the trenches stands on the firing-step with his rifle and bayonet ready in case the enemy attacks.) All along the trench we could hear the British Tommies cursing, and such exclamations as the following could be heard: "Who the devil has been firing my rifle?" "Who has been using mine?" "What mad Canadian made mine dirty?" (It is an unwritten law in the trenches that you use only your own rifle, and should you lose or break your own, you are supposed to take one that belonged to a casualty.) Somebody mentioned that Wardell had been seen firing Lee-Enfield rifles. Soon up and down the trench we could hear, "Where is that Wardell?" "Who has seen that ——— Wardell?" etc. When the Tommies found Wardell at last we thought they would eat him alive, but instead they took it very good-naturedly and just made him clean all the rifles that he had used. It took him several hours, and many were the laughs we had at Wardell's expense afterwards. The favourite sally was to ask him if he had been cleaning rifles lately.

## XXVI

On our first visit to the trenches we were in the front line for twenty-four hours only. That night we were relieved and marched back to billets behind the lines in the town of Armentières. To many of us it seemed wonderful to think that we had actually been in the trenches, just a short distance from the Germans; that we had even fought the enemy and yet were back again behind the lines, alive. Alive? Yes, that was the most wonderful thing of all. We spent twenty-four hours behind the lines and then went back into the trenches again for another spell.

## XXVII

Life continued in this way week after week and month after month, during that first awful winter of the war. In the trenches a few days, then behind the lines again, then back into the trenches. Of course we were moved around the country sometimes from one sector to another; from France into Flanders, then back again into France. To say that conditions were bad hardly describes the situation. Rain and mud all the

time, and everywhere! We lost a great number of our men during that first winter through the bad weather conditions. Men contracted rheumatism or got frozen feet and had to be sent back behind the lines to the hospitals. Very few of them ever returned to their original units, as they were no longer fit for service in the front line.

We thus found ourselves taking part in one of the most trying forms of warfare. The dreariness and monotony of manning long lines of trenches during the winter time began to tell upon us. We had practically no knowledge of trench warfare and we acquired what little knowledge we had at considerable cost. The monotony of it all! Hour after hour and day after day spent in a trench standing in two to three feet of water and mud. I often wonder now how we managed to stand it at all.

Often while in the trenches boys would risk their lives and perform wonderful acts of heroism just, as they said, "to cause some excitement and to break the everlasting monotony."

I remember one incident of this kind. It was while we were in the front line trenches at Fleurbaix. The Germans at the time were about two

hundred yards away from our position. One morning the air became quite misty; in fact, the mist was so heavy that we could not see more than a few yards beyond our trenches. One of our young officers was seen to go over the parapet and start across No-man's-land in the direction of the German trenches. He came back about ten minutes afterwards but did not report what had occurred. Half an hour later the mist lifted and the air became clear again. We reached for our periscopes and looked across No-man's-land to see if there were any movement in the German trenches. Then we noticed, fastened to the barbed wire just a few yards from the enemy trenches, a small Union Jack bravely fluttering in the breeze. At first we wondered how it had got there, but soon recalled the officer who had gone across No-man's-land under cover of the mist. He it was who had fastened it there. That flag remained on the German barbed wire all that day; the Germans dared not get out of their trenches to remove it for we would have shot them. When the young officer was being congratulated on his exploit, he merely remarked that it was just to break the monotony and cause some excitement. It most certainly did.

While in the trenches sometimes days would pass without us even seeing a German and on some days hardly a shot would be fired by either side. This mainly happened, however, when we were opposed to Saxon regiments. When we were confronted by Prussians or Bavarians there was plenty of shooting and enough excitement for everybody. A regiment holding the line near us was one day holding a position opposite the Saxons when a sign bearing the following inscription, printed in English, was raised in the German trench: "We are Saxons; you are Anglo-Saxons; save your ammunition for the Prussians—they relieve us to-night." That proved to us, even in those early days, that there was a good deal of ill-feeling in the ranks of the German army.

## XXVIII

The trench warfare that we were called upon to maintain was not the trench warfare of later days. In those early awful months, we, and the Allied troops in general, were entirely unprepared for war. There are very few of the people at home who understand, or will ever realize, the conditions under which the boys in the Allied armies



were called upon to fight during the early period of the war. We had nothing, literally nothing, and we were fighting the finest and best prepared war-machine the world had ever seen. For us, it was merely flesh against steel, men against guns.

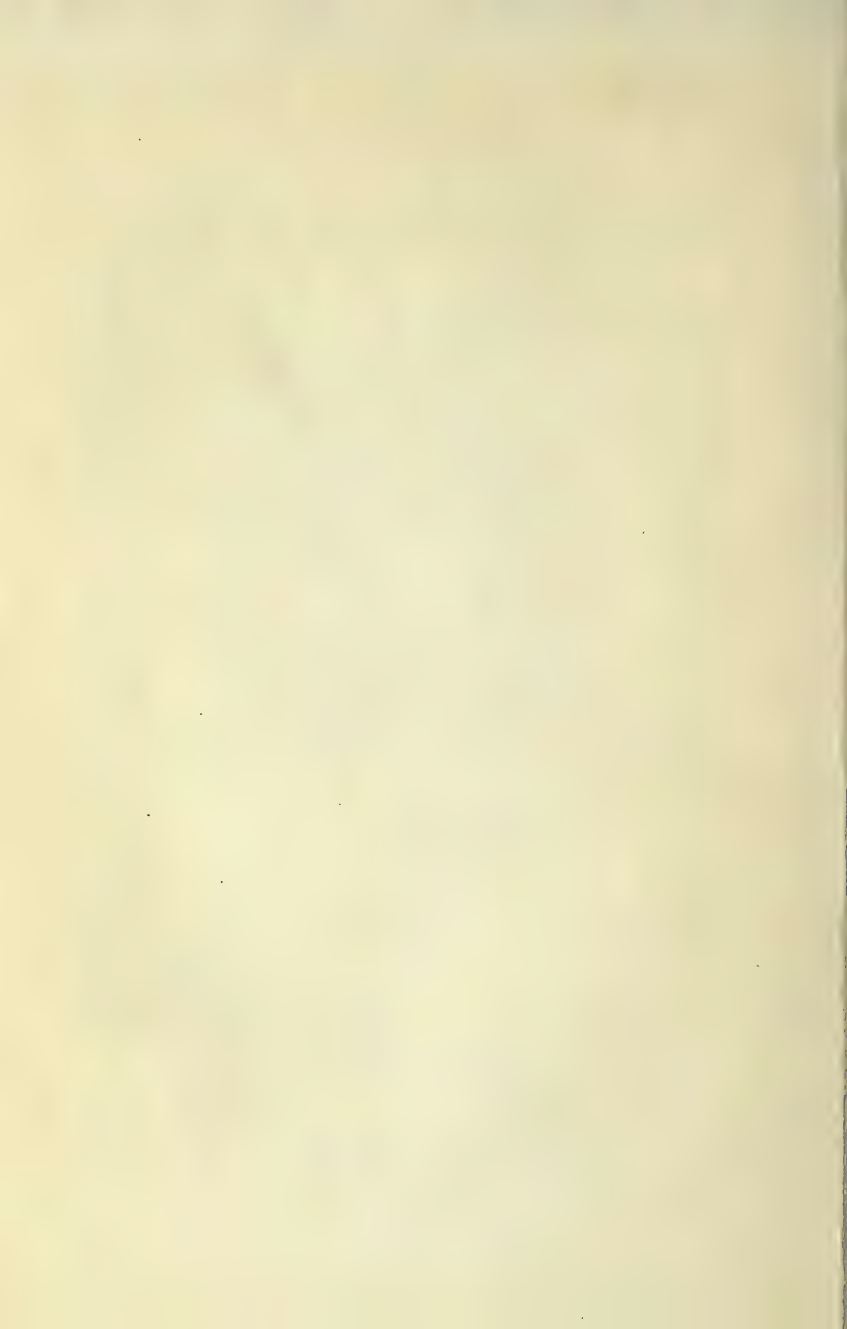
Many times since my return I have lain awake at night and asked myself the question: "How did we manage to hold the lines in those early days? Why did not the Germans just drive us back and sweep everything before them?" Personally, I don't know, but I firmly believe that had the Germans only realized the true state of affairs behind the Allied lines, the fewness of the men who were opposed to them, and the conditions under which those men were fighting, they would have driven us back to the coast and ended the war in their favour. Thank God! (and I say it reverently) they never realized the true state of affairs.

It is said that we were fighting in trenches. The lines we occupied in those days were not even worthy of the name. They were merely holes in the ground—positions some few feet deep that had been dug under fire from the enemy's rifles and machine guns by men lying on the ground using bayonets and finger-nails. We would be



THE AUTHOR IN THE FRONT LINE TRENCHES.

The film from which this print was taken was torn in two and concealed in his tunic. It thus travelled with him to the German Prison Camp.



ordered to a certain position, would advance through a hellish fire and then throw ourselves flat upon the ground and dig for dear life, throwing the earth up in front of us for protection. We frequently had no parapets except the bodies of enemies and our own comrades piled in front of us. There was little or no barbed wire in front of our trenches in those early days, and dug-outs were few and far between. With practically no drainage system in the front line we were continually forced to fight in two or three feet of water and mud. Behind us there were no reserve trenches, no supports, and no communication trenches. We had to cross the open country to reach our various sectors in the front line and many a man became a casualty before reaching the trenches. Worst feature of all during the first few months was the fact that there was just the one line of men. One line of worn-out fighting men, hanging on grimly to battered down positions, keeping the German hordes at bay.

We had been told that at first we were to occupy reserve trenches. There were no reserve trenches in those days. We discovered later there were not sufficient men at the Front at the time who could be spared to hold more than the one first

line. One line! How did we manage to hang on? Again I say, *I don't know.*

## XXIX

Behind the lines our transport and supply columns, our A.S.C. and Quartermaster's Department were neither organized nor efficient, and on many occasions those in the front line were forced to fight without food or supplies.

Our rifles were bad and the ammunition was poor. I have seen men in the front line curse their rifles with tears of vexation and rage streaming down their faces. I have seen men in action forced to hammer the bolt of their rifles with a bayonet because they had jammed. An advancing enemy and a jammed rifle! Try to imagine what it was like. Many of our poor boys lost their lives because of the inferior arms we carried in those days. We needed a great many things, a great many things, but our greatest need was for arms, for artillery and an adequate supply of shells. Our records show that during the first few months of the war the Germans were able to throw over thirty shells to our one. Thirty to one, think of it! Why, when we were holding what was called a "quiet sector," the German



shell-fire pounded our lines to pieces and inflicted heavy casualties upon us, wiping out of existence platoons and companies while our guns were unable to reply.

The following happened on our sector many times. We would be in the front line. In the trenches with us would be an artillery observation officer placed in the line to watch the effect of our fire upon the German positions and the effect of their fire upon ours, he being connected by 'phone wires to our guns in the rear. Suddenly the enemy guns would open upon us with a terrific bombardment. Shells would burst all along the trench and as the few minutes passed the numbers of our company and battalion would grow less. Then, in desperation, our officers would go to the artilleryman and beg him to send word back to our guns for support. The observation officer would 'phone back to the guns, but in nine cases out of ten the answer came: "Sorry, we can't fire; we are out of shells!" "Out of shells!" Yes, they usually were. The munition industry had not been organized at home. When we were fortunate enough to have guns in our rear they were too often left without an adequate supply of shells.

Is it any wonder that we lost so many men in those days? Unprepared for war! Yes, we were, but, thank Heaven, all that was changed as time went by. Yet people still talk of the great achievements of the German Army in 1914 and 1915; of the rapid way in which they advanced; of how they drove the Allies back and swept through Belgium and France. No doubt the Germans did accomplish a great deal in those days, but to myself and to every man who fought through the first few months of the war, the miracle of it all is and always will be, how the Allied lines were able to hold at all.

## XXX

While in the trenches we had a number of varied experiences in connection with the bombing that was carried on by both our troops and the Germans. At that time the most popular bomb was the famous "jam tin." This bomb we manufactured ourselves from old jam tins or cigarette boxes which we filled with souvenirs (nails and pieces of iron and steel), placing an explosive in the centre. The whole was then packed tight with a piece of rag or paper, leaving a fuse

exposed. This fuse was timed, by its length, to explode in either three or five seconds. If the fuse were too long there was the danger of the bomb being returned from the German trench before it had exploded; if too short there remained the danger of a premature explosion in our own trench.

When the bomb was prepared, the man who was to do the throwing would stand in a traverse of the trench, raise his arm ready, while another man would light the fuse. Then away she went, sailing over towards Fritzie's trench. It was interesting to watch the anxious expression on the bomber's face while the fuse was being lighted. He had to count one, two, three, and so on to gauge the distance to the German trench. The man who lit the fuse spent some anxious moments, too, but he seldom stayed long after the fuse was started.

"All ready!" The signal would be given. "Light her, you d——n fool, hurry!" from the bomber. "D——n these matches," from the lighter. Then all together we would yell, "let 'er go," and we would duck for safety. One of the boys of the First Canadian Division won the Distinguished Conduct Medal for catching a German

bomb and throwing it back into the German trenches before it had exploded. He was lucky, but nevertheless it was a remarkably brave thing to do and he thoroughly earned the decoration.

Another form of bomb was the "Hair Brush"—a deadly affair, usually more dangerous to ourselves than to the enemy and more trouble than it was worth. There were also "Rifle grenades"—bombs that were sent over to the German trenches from a rifle. Later, we got the "Mills bomb" which was manufactured in the factories of England. This bomb gave the best satisfaction of all and became very popular with the boys. Bombing schools were established behind the lines, where we were taught to make and to throw bombs in the proper manner. Bombing squads and companies were organized and the members became known as the "Suicide Club," since bombing was regarded as dangerous work. In my opinion, however, it is not any more dangerous than many other occupations of the front line.

Some of the boys considered that going out into No-man's-land to hold a listening post position was the most dangerous; others that it was more hazardous to be sent out to repair breaks in the barbed wire, while many said that being ordered

"Over the Top" into a bayonet charge was worst of all. It is all dangerous work out there and it is surprising what little effect danger has upon the men generally.

## XXXI

After having been at the Front for a short while you become absolutely callous to danger and feel that, after all, if you are going to get it, you will get it. It is simply not the least bit of good worrying about it. Each of the different units of the Allied armies has its own philosophy on this subject. The Canadian says, "Oh, well, every bullet that is going to get you has your name and number marked right on it." I think that the best philosophy of all, however, is that of the French *poilu*. He says, "Well, there is either a war, or there is not a war; if there is not a war, why there is no need to worry. If there is a war, then you are either mobilized or not mobilized; if not mobilized there is no need to worry. If you are mobilized, well, you are sent to the Front or not sent to the Front; if you are not sent to the Front, there is no need to worry. If you are sent to the Front, then you are either in a safe position or in an exposed position; if you are in a safe position,



there is no need to worry. If you are in an exposed position, then you are either wounded or not wounded; if not wounded there is no need to worry. If you are wounded, then you either die or you recover; if you recover, there is no need to worry. If you die—*You Can't Worry.*”

## XXXII

That is the spirit that animates the boys of the Allied armies at the Front. That wonderful, never-say-die, carry-on, smiling spirit. The enemy has not crushed it; the enemy never will. I only wish that everyone back home, who has a relative at the Front, could go “Over There,” if only for a short while, and see the boys. See them behind the lines, in their billets, living under the worst conditions, dirty, filthy; sometimes with short rations. Yet they are happy; they can smile, organize concerts and sports, and then enjoy these concerts and sports far more than ever they did at home, because at the Front only a certain limited time is their own. An enemy aeroplane passes overhead; bombs are dropped; the boys run for cover; some become casualties; yet a few minutes later the sports are resumed and again the boys smile.

See them on their way to the trenches, ploughing through water and mud mile after mile, carrying heavy loads. Many of them are going to meet their death. On, on they march; ambulances and wagons pass them; they stop every hour for ten minutes' rest. Still they keep on. They are going "Up the line with the best o' luck." Some of the boys are killed or wounded on the way, yet on they go in never ending streams. See the boys then, tired out, weary, foot-sore, dirty, wet through to the skin, yet are they unhappy? Oh, no! Still they can smile and go "Up the line with the best o' luck."

See them in the trenches. Are there great hardships there? Yes, there are hardships at the Front that the people at home will never realize or understand. Life in a front line trench is just plain Hell. Yet, see the boys there—sitting on a muddy fire-step with their feet in a few inches of water, or in a dirty, damp, dug-out on sentry duty, etc. Still they are in the best of spirits, still cheerful, still able to smile. Even in the front line, facing death under a heavy bombardment, the boys can joke and smile.

To illustrate this a good story is told. Four men were hanging on to a battered-down traverse

of a trench and beating off an enemy attack. Over on their left, round another traverse, one man was fighting out the position alone with a machine gun. Owing to the bend in the trench the four men could not see the one man who was fighting alone, but this conversation went on. One of the four shouted, "Oh, Bill, where are yer?" "I'm 'ere an' I'm orright," Bill answered. Ten minutes later the same voice yelled again, "Say, Bill! are yer still all right?" "Yes, I'm fine," Bill answered. Ten minutes later, "Oh, Bill! Did they get yer yet?" "Nah! they can't get me." Half an hour later: "Oh, Bill! are you sure you are all right?" Bill did not seem to like all this attention and shouted back, "Yes, I'm still all right, but why the devil are you so interested in me?" "Interested in you!" the answer came; "We don't give a d——n about you, but we've drawn lots and got up a pool to see who is going to be the first one hit and I've drawn you."

But if you want to see the boys at their best see them go "Over the Top" and attack the enemy trenches. Yes, you are just a wee bit nervous while waiting for the signal to "go over." You know that over the parapet there are snipers and machine gunners waiting to "get you." You

know that you will have to go through that hellish shell fire known as the barrage. You realize that you may not come back, but you do not think of that. You are "going over" to do something; you must get the other fellow before he gets you. As the signal is given over you go with a smile on your face, a cheer on your lips, with the officers ahead yelling "come on," not "go on," and before you realize it, you are in the enemy trenches, fighting, cursing, stabbing, pushing, yelling. It lasts for a few minutes, perhaps an hour, but at last you realize that you have won out; the reaction comes; you look at each other and you smile.

On the way across No-man's-land some have been hit, become casualties.

See those boys, suffering agony from terrible wounds, their bodies covered with blood, perhaps with a limb shattered. Go to them, talk to them, and what happens? They will ask you for a cigarette. Light it, and then in spite of the pain and the suffering, they will smile. Why do they smile? How can they smile? Oh, it is all so wonderful that I can hardly explain it. After all there is a certain fascination in being on active service in such a war as this. It is a glorious

privilege to be "Out There" doing something. It is wonderful to be "among the boys"—"the real men."

## XXXIII

Remember that the boys at the Front are seeing the thousand and one things of which the people at home are merely reading. They are seeing sights that we saw, seeing the results of the German invasion of Northern France and Belgium, the results of the atrocities that were committed by the Germans. Seeing, as we saw, little kiddies with limbs that had been severed by German bayonets and sabres, seeing the poor women-folk and the girls in the terrible condition in which they were left by the Huns. Yes, those stories are quite true. Would to Heaven that they were not! I saw many things with my own eyes out there, which still seem to be absolutely unbelievable to the people at home.

Sometimes, while marching on the way to the trenches, we would pass through some of those battered villages and towns, places which, previous to the war, had been beautiful, but were now desolate wrecks because the Huns had been there. We would see those poor little French and Belgian



kiddies; see the poor girls. Then the boys would look at each other and say, "My God! see that! What if those same things were happening back in our country?" Then we would just grit our teeth, clench our fists, and march on in silence. We felt glad that we were there. In spite of the hard conditions, in spite of death, the wounds, the misery, the utter horror of it all, we were glad that we were able to be "Out There"—able to meet the men who performed those atrocious acts, able to fight them and help to avenge France and Belgium. But more than that, we were glad to be "Out There" to prevent those same things from happening in our own fair Canada. There are hardships at the Front, but there are great compensations also.

#### XXXIV

We were not in the trenches all the time, however. We would go into the line for a certain period, usually from four to twelve days. Whatever time we spent in the trenches, we spent an equal amount behind the lines. Behind the lines we managed to have a fairly good time, and tried, as far as possible, to forget that we were at war by playing baseball, football, cards and organizing concerts.

It was during a period of "rest" behind the lines that I had my first taste of "field punishment," or, as Tommy calls it, "crucifixion." When you are at the Front and serving a term of field punishment, life seems to be hardly worth living. For two hours a day you are handcuffed to a tree or lashed to a gunwheel. For another two hours you do "pack drill," which is marching up and down carrying a weight of ninety pounds on your back. During the remainder of the day (or night) you are detailed to do all the dirty work of the company. If, during the time that you are serving your term of punishment the regiment moves into the trenches, you have to do all the dangerous work, such as listening post, fixing the barbed wire, bringing in the rations, going out in No-man's-land on patrol, and so on. Therefore, if you are serving a term of punishment in the trenches, you have the finest chance in the world to get killed.

## XXXV

We were billeted about seven miles from the town of Armentières and had been behind the lines in these billets for three days when the authorities became very generous and had a "pay

day." We each received the magnificent sum of fifteen francs (three dollars), and at once decided to go into the town of Armentières and see some of the high life and spend our wealth. Incidentally, we hoped to be able to procure a decent meal. Passes to Armentières, however, were not issued, so we issued passes to ourselves by the simple method of taking "French leave." We were paid off at noon. At two o'clock the company was called on parade and out of the original two hundred and fifty, there were only three present. The rest (I among them) were in the city.

Orders were at once sent to Armentières, informing the Military Police there to arrest all Canadians found in the place. I had gone along with my chum, Gamble, and naturally was looking for something to eat. On walking down one of the streets we noticed a group of our boys standing together and decided to ask them if they could direct us to a restaurant. Our company sergeant-major was among the group, so Gamble walked up to him and said, "Say, Major, where can we get some eats?" At once a man stepped up to us and said: "Canadians, eh? Fall in! You are under arrest." He was a military policeman, so we had to join the group and stay there till more

of our boys were rounded up. Shortly afterwards another military policeman (how we all hate them!) rode up on a horse to escort us to the prison in the town. There were about thirty of us in the group and we were marched two deep with the policeman at the head, on his horse. Gamble and I were the last two in the line, and after we had marched about two blocks, Gamble turned to me and said, "Say, Gibby, let's beat it; when we come to the next corner just make a dash and foller me." I agreed to do this and we marched on ready to make the break. On reaching the corner, Gamble ran into a side street and I followed, but just as we turned the corner, he slipped and his rifle clattered on the hard cobble stones, making an awful noise. The military policeman heard this and came after us as hard as he could, Overtaking us, he drew his revolver and exclaimed, "Break an escort, would you? Well, you can be shot for doing that while on active service. Now fall in again; we will deal with you two later." Needless to say we "fell in," and together with the others were placed in jail in the famous old Town Hall of Armentières.

That night we were sent back to our company to face, as we thought, a court-martial. We had

visions of facing a firing squad and I know we felt that death in that manner would not be too pleasant.

When we reached our billets we found our captain waiting for us. He was a fine man. He had served as a trooper during the South African War, and never allowed us to forget this fact. He lined us up and then began to address us, something like this: "Well, they got you, did they? There are only about thirty of you, though; where the —— are the rest? Oh, well, they may get in without being caught; if they do, good luck to them! You fellows will get it, though. This has passed out of my hands and you will all face the colonel to-morrow, when you can explain why you were absent from Reserve Billets. Dismiss!"

Reserve Billets! Great Scott! We had not known that. Being in reserve billets means that you are the first ones to be called upon in case of a break in the line. What if the Germans had attacked while we had been in Armentières? Our "French leave" amounted practically to desertion in face of the enemy. We certainly did spend a sleepless night. Next morning we faced the colonel to answer the charges of "Being absent,



etc., on such a date from Reserve Billets at — while on Active Service.” We were very lucky. The colonel must have had a good breakfast that morning, he was so lenient. For punishment, all the N.C.O’s were reduced to the ranks, and we mere privates were each sentenced to “seven days first field punishment.” Seven days! Why, we could have cheered. We had expected to be shot, at least.

I managed to serve that seven days punishment, but, not two weeks later, I got another five days of the same punishment. My second “crime” was not a serious offence, merely lounging outside the guard house when I should have been inside on duty, but on account of my previous record, or as it is called, “Crime Sheet,” showing that I had served seven days’ punishment, the colonel decided that I was a bad character and gave me another five days. He was not feeling so good, I imagine, the second time that I was brought before him. After that, I decided that it was much better to behave, so I did not again “have the pleasure” of serving any more “field punishment.”

CHAPTER II

IN IT



## CHAPTER II

### IN IT

#### I

In March, 1915, the First Division (ours) had the distinction of taking part in the great Battle of Neuve Chapelle, the first advance of the British Army in the war after trench warfare had been established. The division did not play a very important part in the battle, however, as the positions we were detailed to hold were on the flanks. We were called upon to beat off the German counter-attacks on the left, while the British Tommies were making their advance on the right.

The attack had been planned for weeks, by the men higher up. We were informed that the main object of the attack was to find out if it were possible to break the German lines or not, and to capture the Aubers Ridge, which commanded the city of Lille. Once the ridge was taken, it was thought that the city of Lille would soon fall into

our hands. Up till that time (March 10th, 1915) the German lines had not been broken, and a great deal of speculation was rife among us as to the ultimate outcome of the battle.

The plan of the battle was roughly this. The First Army was to make the main attack, with the Fourth Army Corps on the left flank and the famous Indian Corps on the right. While these units were attacking the village of Neuve Chapelle, the troops of the First Army Corps were to launch a minor attack at Givenchy. The Third Army Corps were also to attack from the south of Armentières. These smaller attacks on the flanks were made for the purpose of keeping the enemy engaged and to prevent him from bringing up reinforcements.

It was the great opportunity for which we had all waited for months. We were going to attack at last. For weeks and months we had faced those German trenches and many times had wondered why we were never ordered to go "Over the Top" and begin to end the war. For months we had hung on to battered down positions, beating off the massed attacks of the Germans. We had suffered heavy casualties in these attacks. We had been short of machine guns, but the deadly



manner in which we had learnt to use our rifles almost convinced the Germans that every man in our army was armed with a machine gun.

Now, however, the waiting was to end. We, not they, were to be the ones to attack. Fritz was to receive a little of his own medicine. Were we pleased? Why, when the word was passed around that our division was to be among the attacking troops the prospect almost sent us wild with joy. We were going to do something at last!

However, it was not to be. The British Tommies and the Indian troops did all the attacking and we merely hung on to the flanks. The Canadian guns were there, though. Our artillery played a noble part in the great bombardment that preceded the sending over of the first wave of attacking infantry. That preliminary bombardment seemed to us at the time the greatest thing in the world. More guns had been concentrated on that one front than had been on any front since the outbreak of the war. It was stated that more shells were fired in that one bombardment than had been used during the entire South African War. It seemed as though nothing could live through it, but we had not reckoned on the guile of our enemies, who lay, practically safe, in their

concrete dug-outs forty or fifty feet under the ground. Later, at Ypres, the bombardment at Neuve Chapelle seemed almost nothing, and boys who fought through those two battles and were later on the Somme, say that even Ypres was a mere bagatelle compared with the bombardment at the Somme.

At last the din of the gun-fire died down, the barrage lifted, and we knew that the British troops had begun their advance. They rushed across No-man's-land in a magnificent charge and bore down upon the German trenches. The Germans, to a certain extent, had been demoralized and dazed by the terrific bombardment, so it was merely a matter of a few minutes before the men in their front line were overcome and the first line in British hands. The Huns were absolutely terrified when they saw our famous Indian troops attacking them. The Gurkhas and Sikhs showed them little mercy, however, and made short work of them when they swarmed from their trenches screaming "Kamerad." On and on the battle raged. The troops who had so successfully taken the German first line were not yet satisfied, and, instead of waiting for reinforcing

troops or for supports, or even for the barrage to lift, they swept on again to the German second and third lines.

This impetuous fighting cost us many lives and we suffered heavy casualties. They advanced too far, became cut off from the main body, and were either killed or captured.

It was wonderful, however, to see the way in which the Indian troops fought in that battle. They swept across the open in a furious charge and it seemed as if nothing could stop them. Evidently nothing did. What happened in the German trenches when they got there I don't know, but after the battle I saw many of the Indians with very broad grins on their faces, escorting German prisoners to the rear. Most of them had brought back trophies of the fight. They would hold these grim, gruesome objects in the air, saying, with a smile of delight, "Souvenir."

The battle on the whole was not the great success that had been hoped. Altogether, we only advanced about a mile on a front of four miles. We failed to capture the Aubers Ridge. We had grossly underestimated the strength of the enemy and our bombardment had done little or no

damage to the German second or third lines. Therefore, after taking the enemy first line, our troops met with stubborn resistance from the Germans and whole battalions were wiped out by the merciless fire of the German machine gunners. After having taken the German first line, the British troops found that, instead of having broken the German line completely as they thought, they had merely driven back the advanced outposts and the enemy second and third lines loomed up stronger than ever. Still they kept on—attack after attack, wave after wave. Whole companies were “hung up” on the German barbed wire within a few yards of the great objective and were subsequently wiped out.

The tragedy of it all was that the supports and reinforcements, in many cases, did not arrive in time. Had they done so, perhaps the enemy line would have been completely broken and the war map of the Western Front changed completely. The Germans were absolutely demoralized and bewildered by the suddenness and dash of the attack, and had the reinforcements arrived, and had there been no delay in other parts of the line, it is probable that the enemy would have been completely routed.

## II

The casualties suffered by the British were frightfully heavy and the question was asked repeatedly: "Was it worth the price we paid?" Yes it was, for, as I have said, until that time the German lines had never been broken and the enemy defence system had not been pierced. At Neuve Chapelle we did not attain our great object, but we did break the German line and proved that, once we had got sufficient men and enough guns on the Western Front, the German line could again be broken more completely and the enemy be driven right back. The enemy was *not* invincible as had been thought during the first few weeks of the war.

When night came the attack was exhausted and the Germans began to bring up reinforcements and consolidate their battered positions. It was therefore decided that the British should dig themselves in and hang on. A line of trenches was formed below the ridge that dominates Lille and there the British Tommies held positions for many weary weeks afterwards.

Over on the left flank we had been engaged in some pretty hot work while beating off the enemy



counter-attacks, but the Germans did not get to within a hundred yards of our trench, and our casualties were consequently light.

### III

A few days afterwards we were relieved and went back behind the lines again to billets for a "rest." Personally, I believe that the word "rest" is a misnomer as used at the Front. Behind the lines you *do not* rest. In fact you have far more work to do and are kept much more busy than you ever are when in the trenches. Most of us, when out there, would have preferred to be in the trenches (provided the weather was good) rather than behind the lines *resting*.

Life behind the lines is one continual round of reviews, inspections, parades, drills, route marches and fatigues. After you have drilled or marched all day long, and are utterly worn out, perhaps at night you are given a pick and a shovel and marched forward to dig reserve trenches behind the lines. You dig till day begins to break, then march miles back to your billets and all that day you drill again or are inspected. Drat those inspections. They inspect your feet, your hair, your uniform, your body, your rifle, bayonet and

ammunition, your kit, your boots, your emergency bandages and rations. In fact they inspect everything and at the most inopportune moments. Just after you have lent half your belongings to your pal, along comes an officer who finds that half your equipment is missing. It is supplied, whether you want it or not, and charged up to your account.

In this respect, however, our company was very fortunate as we had a captain who was a "regular fellow." He would pass among the ranks during a kit inspection and this would be his usual line of talk: "Hm—Private Blank, you have lost your bayonet, eh?" and "You, Private —, you have no water bottle. You, Jones, where is your haversack? Lost 'em, eh? Well, now, listen to me. I was a trooper in South Africa (he never let us forget that). I always had enough to make two kits. Get me? Tomorrow I am going to have you all on parade again, and I want every man to have a complete kit. There are lots of kits in France. But remember—not from your own battalion. That's all. Dismiss!" We "got him" all right and I can assure you that next day we all had complete kits. *We acquired them.* (Soldiers have ways of *acquiring* such things.)

## IV

At about eight o'clock in the evening on March 31st a party of men was called for, to go up the line behind the position at St. Eloi to dig a number of reserve trenches in preparation for the big attack which was to be made on that sector in the course of the next few days. Of course, I had to be one of the unlucky group picked out.

St. Eloi was about eighteen miles from the place in which we were billeted, and, for a change, we were taken along in ammunition wagons instead of being marched, which was more usual. We were "armed" with a pick and shovel. On the way we were all very cheerful and in the best of spirits, and, as the wagons clattered through some sleepy little village or other, we would either yell at the top of our voices or sing songs. Our favourite song at that time was "Are we down-hearted? No! No! No!" Accent was always put on the "No!" Before morning, however, as will be shown later, we were the most down-hearted group of soldiers in France. We reached the trenches at last and commenced to dig. How Tommy hates that kind of work! A common remark at that time was "We have marched all

over this blinkin' country, and what we have not marched over we have dug up."

Our digging party lasted from eleven at night till daybreak next morning, but we did not do much digging, as the German snipers and machine gunners had evidently discovered our movements and they kept up a continual fire all through the night. Therefore we spent most of the time in ducking and "hugging the ground" for safety. Just before dawn we were sent back behind the lines to the village where we were to be picked up by the wagons. A number of men had been hit during the night and these were taken away in ambulances. We considered them lucky. On arriving at the village we found no wagons awaiting us. Still we thought they would soon arrive and it was decided to wait. One hour passed, then two, but no wagons. We then began to think of that eighteen miles back to our billets. "What if we have to march?" someone suggested. "Walk be d——d!" we all said; "we would rather stay here." Another hour passed. By this time we had all fallen asleep on the road or in a nearby field. I was rudely awakened by a kick and one of the boys said, "Well, the —— old wagons are not coming; we have to march back." We

started. Every hour we were given ten minutes' rest, and we just dropped in the muddy roads and fell fast asleep. How we cursed those wagon-drivers! "Where the devil are they? Why have they not picked us up?" Then someone remembered the date. "Oh, boys," he yelled, "this is the first of April. Those d——d drivers think this is a fine joke; I guess we are a lot of blinkin' April fools!"

## V

A few days later the division was moved across the border from France into Belgium. We were informed that we would soon be in a hot part of the line as we were to occupy a section of trenches outside the city of Ypres. On the march we passed a number of troops, seasoned veterans, who had just come out of the trenches which we were to occupy. We waved our hands and shouted to them, but they seemed too downhearted to reply. Motor ambulances passed us carrying their grim loads of wounded men. Then along the road came men swathed in bandages, limping badly from their wounds. All had the same story to tell of the horrors of those trenches outside Ypres; of badly constructed positions with no dug-outs; and of a continual bombardment



from the German guns. They told us of the men who had been wounded and forced to lie out in No-man's-land without any attention, many of them to die. It all seemed terrible to us then. Little did we realize that our own fate was to be much worse within the next few days.

Upon reaching the village of Vlamertinghe we were detailed to billets (barns) and for the next few days enjoyed a period of rest (?) behind the lines. We organized baseball and football teams, and arranged to have a regular field day. The date set for the big sports programme was the fateful April 22nd, 1915, one of the greatest days in Canada's history. It was on that day, that, for the first time, the Germans used their infamous poison gas. On the same day opened the terrible Second Battle of Ypres.

It was at Ypres that I "got mine." In that battle I was wounded in the head and in the leg, and also fell into the hands of the Germans, thus becoming a prisoner of war. But of that later.

It would be impossible for me to go into all the details or to describe the magnificent part that was played in that battle by all the various units of the Canadian Division. Furthermore, I feel that it is quite unnecessary for me to do so as the whole

world rang with the story; and the way the Canadians saved the situation has become a matter of history.

## VI

Some little idea of the way in which our boys fought can be gathered from the words of our general (General Alderson) when he addressed the few survivors (there were but few) of the division, a few days after the battle. He said "I tell you truly that my heart is so full that I hardly know how to speak to you. It is full with two feelings—the first being sorrow for the loss of those comrades of ours who have gone; and the second, pride in what the First Canadian Division has done.

"As regards our comrades who have lost their lives (let us speak of them with our caps off) my faith in the Almighty is such that I am perfectly sure that when men die, as they have died, doing their duty and fighting for their country, for the Empire and to save the situation for others—in fact they have died for their friends—no matter what their past lives have been, no matter what they have done that they ought not to have done, I am perfectly sure that the Almighty takes them and looks after them at

once. Lads, we cannot leave them better than like that.

“Now I feel that we may, without any false pride, think a little of what the Division has done during the past few days. I would first of all tell you that I have never been so proud of anything in my life as I am of my armlet with ‘Canada’ on it. I thank you, and congratulate you from the bottom of my heart, for the part each one of you has taken in giving me this feeling of pride.

“I think it is possible that all of you do not quite realize that if we had retired on the evening of April 22nd, when our Allies fell back before the gas and left our left flank in the air, the whole of the 27th and 28th Divisions would probably have been cut off. Certainly they would not have got away a gun or a vehicle of any sort, and probably not more than half of the infantry would have escaped.

“This is what our Commander-in-Chief meant when he telegraphed as he did, that ‘The Canadians saved the situation.’ My lads, if ever men had a right to be proud in this world, you have.

“I know my military history pretty well, and I cannot think of an instance, especially when the cleverness and determination of the enemy is

taken into account, in which troops were placed in such a difficult position. Nor can I think of an instance in which so much depended on the standing fast of one division.

“ You will remember that the last time I spoke to you, just before you went into the trenches at Sailley, now over two months ago, I told you about my old regiment,—the Royal West Kents—having gained a reputation for never budging from their trenches, no matter how they were attacked. I said that I was quite sure that in a short time, the Army out here would be saying the same about you.

“ I little thought—none of us thought—how soon those words would come true. But now, to-day, not only the Army out here, but all Canada, all Britain, and all the whole Empire are saying that you, too, stand fast.

“ There is one more word that I would say to you before I stop. You have made a reputation second to none in this war; but, remember, no man can live on his reputation. He must keep on adding to it. And I feel just as sure that you will do so, as sure as I did two months ago when I told you that you would make a reputation when the time came.

"I am now going to shake hands with your officers, and as I do so, I want you to feel that I am shaking hands with each of you, as I would actually do if time permitted."

## VII

The battle opened at five o'clock on the afternoon of April 22nd, 1915. The ground over which it was fought was the famous Ypres salient. There, the trenches ran in the shape of a gigantic horseshoe, some five and a half miles long, directly around the city of Ypres. The Germans were holding the outside flanks of the salient, we the inside, therefore they were able to pour a terrific enfilading fire upon us from three flanks.

For two days previous to the gas-attack the Germans had kept up a continuous bombardment on the city of Ypres and the surrounding villages. Numbers of the civilian population were killed by this shell fire, yet the people hesitated to leave their homes to seek shelter farther behind the lines. They stayed in their homes till the last and were either killed or absolutely forced to leave.

About six hours before the gas was sent over, the bombardment increased in its intensity and



Ypres and the surrounding district became an inferno of bursting shells. Ypres was transformed in a few hours from a busy, cheerful war city into a home of desolation, and remained so afterwards.

Holding the left flank of the salient at the time were the French native troops, Turcos and Algerians, men from the north of Africa, who were serving in the French Army. On the right flank of the salient was the famous Canadian Highland Brigade, our own wonderful Kilties. The French troops, on the left, were the first to bear the brunt of the gas attack. The Germans sent the gas across No-man's-land in clouds—clouds some ten to twenty feet high and of a greenish yellow colour—chlorine!

It was far heavier than air, therefore it clung to the ground and entered the French trenches. Remember, the men there were natives, who had never before heard of poison gas. The gas choked them, it blinded them, it left them gasping for breath. Panic struck them, and those among them not overcome by the fumes, dropped everything and ran.

From our billets just behind the firing line we saw those French natives running. They came

tearing along the roads, throwing away everything they possessed—their rifles and equipment—fleeing in a mad, frenzied retreat. Their faces worked spasmodically, as though they were in terrible agony. They tore open the collars of their tunics, gasped for air, and screamed as they ran that the Germans were coming; the Germans had broken through. “Allemands! Save yourselves; retreat.” They were all that were left of the men who had been engulfed in the gas.

What a sight it was! Enough to unman the stoutest heart. Intermingled with the retiring troops came many civilians, people who had lived near to the firing line and had also been driven out by the bombardment and the gas. It was a pitiful sight to see those poor people. The men were carrying any little household goods they had saved from their burning homes, while the women carried the little children or helped along the old men. Even as they ran, they were still under fire from the German guns. Shells were bursting overhead and tearing up the roads, killing and wounding many of these poor fugitives.

When we marched into action that evening, we passed the bodies of hundreds of these poor civilians, victims of the German shell-fire; victims

of German *kultur*. People still wonder why we fought so well in that battle, but any troops would have fought as well as we did had they seen those same sights upon going into action.

The Germans had broken through on the left flank, but on the right flank was the Canadian Highland Brigade. They also were gassed, but did *not* retire. Instead, they extended their lines directly across the left flank, flung themselves into the breach made by the retiring native troops, launched attack after attack upon the German trenches, drove the enemy back, recaptured most of the ground lost, and then held on till the rest of the division could get to their support.

## VIII

At seven o'clock that evening we were ordered into the battle to support the Highland Brigade. Then began our march from the billets to the trenches into the greatest battle of the war to that time. Little did we realize then that, before another day had passed, more than half of us would be dead and more than two-thirds casualties. We marched on in silence. As we crossed the Yser Canal we came under the fire of the German guns, but suffered no casualties.

Later, when marching up the Ypres-Menin road, we passed a British battery that had been pounding the German positions for hours. Just as we came alongside, the German guns "found" the British battery and opened with a murderous fire of shrapnel. The shrapnel burst right over us and, as we were marching in fours, it inflicted heavy casualties.

One shell made a direct hit upon our machine-gun section, killing the officer and six men and wounding about thirty others. At once we were ordered into skirmishing formation, that is, to spread out, so that the shell fire could not do so much damage. We threw ourselves flat upon the ground and put our packs over our heads for protection from the flying shrapnel.

Shortly after we marched on again and at last found ourselves behind the Highlanders' position, just outside the village of St. Julien. (St. Julien is a village some four miles north-east of Ypres, and it was around that district that all the heavy fighting occurred.) Arrived there, we were ordered to dig ourselves in, form a line of reserve trenches in case our lines were again broken that night, and stay in support of the Highlanders. How we dug, with bayonets, fingers and

entrenching tools! Bullets were flying everywhere, so the sooner we were dug in the sooner were we safe. While training we had been taught how to do this, and had been told repeatedly that we would have to be able to dig ourselves in and be under cover in ten minutes. At St. Julien I do not believe it took us anything like so long as that.

We were not called upon to attack that night. That was the night, however, in which the Tenth and Sixteenth Battalions made their famous charge through Langemarck Woods and recaptured the guns which had been lost earlier in the day through the retirement of the French natives.

The charge made by these two battalions was simply marvellous and will live forever in Canadian history. The advance was made at midnight, under the heaviest of machine-gun and rifle fire. Less than one-third of the men who started reached the German trenches, yet these swept on and captured the position and guns at the point of the bayonet. Then, without even pausing to reform their lines, they swept through Langemarck Woods. The Germans tried to retire, then threw up their hands with the usual cry of "Kamerad," but the Highlanders made short work of them. It was an hour or more of



deadly bayonet work. They had recaptured the guns and the woods, but found that there were not sufficient men left to continue the attack. They attempted to bring back the guns, but, finding it impossible, they destroyed them. They then consolidated the position and continued to hang on.

## IX

Our great opportunity came the next morning. Just as day was dawning we heard that there was another break in the line, this time a little to the west of St. Julien. Two companies of the battalion were ordered to make an attack to recapture the position, and "C" and "D" companies were the ones chosen. I was a member of "C" company.

When we were ordered into that attack we felt that it was to certain death and very few expected to come back. During the battle we earned the name "Sacrifice Companies," as we were sent to attack the most advanced part of the salient and were told to hang on and hold back the Germans as long as possible.

From those two companies—about four hundred and fifty men—not one officer returned, and

when the battalion was lined up a few days after the battle, it was found that only two of the original four hundred and fifty were left. The rest were either wounded or captured or had paid the supreme sacrifice.

Personally, I shall never forget that attack. Over on our left flank, the Second Battalion had advanced. Under cover of the darkness they had taken the enemy completely by surprise, had taken his trenches and were now holding them. Then, on the right flank, we started to advance. Our trenches were separated from the Germans by eight hundred yards, and we were to cover the distance in short rushes, running ahead about twenty yards and then dropping to the ground for cover, opening fire at the same time upon the Germans. Then on again till we almost reached their trenches. "One last rush, use the bayonet and drive them out," was the order.

We started our advance according to instructions, but had only gone a short distance when our men began to drop. Before we had gone a hundred yards more than one-half of our number were hit and we had lost most of our officers.

Our captain was splendid, and his courage and bravery set a wonderful example to the men.

He was here, there and everywhere, dashing through the murderous shell fire and through a perfect rain of rifle and machine-gun bullets. Snapping orders to right and left, he rushed on, yelling, "Come on, men." All he carried was his cane; I don't think he drew his revolver. It was sheer slaughter to go on; at every yard more men fell, but the captain was still going, and we felt, as one of the boys expressed it at the time, "My God! if he can go on, so can we."

We went on. We had still a distance of some two hundred yards to go, when all at once the life and spirit faded out of our line. It seemed absolutely impossible to advance any farther in face of such a fire. We had started into the attack in one line, every man three yards from his neighbour, but by this time there was a distance of about fifteen yards between those who were left. In another moment more we would have broken; our objective would not have been gained, and the Second Battalion on the left would have been outflanked and cut off. But the boys of the Second Battalion grasped the situation. They seemed to realize that our line was wavering, and they acted at the right moment. Shells were bursting everywhere, rifle and machine-gun

bullets playing right over their trench, but, regardless of the danger, several of them jumped on to the parapet, waved their caps to us and yelled, "Come on, Canadians. Come on!"

That one sentence put all the life and spirit there was in the world into our line. At once we rallied, gave a terrific cheer and swept on into the German trench. Then followed a few minutes of sharp bayonet fighting and the attack was over. We had won; we had gained our objective, for the present at least, and the Second Battalion position was saved.

Less than one hundred and fifty of the four hundred and fifty who had started out reached the German trenches. Most of our officers had been killed or wounded in the charge, yet we had "got there." We had passed through a living hell of fire to gain what we had gone after. But we had got it—that German trench.

Had the Germans launched a counter-attack at that moment, however, I believe we would have been driven back once more, for the reaction after the charge was so great that we lay in the bottom of the trench for a few minutes unable to move. After a little, one of the few surviving officers turned to a group of us and said, "Well, it's

pretty hot around here; a lot of our boys have 'Gone West,' eh? I have a piece of chocolate here and I will give it to the next man who is hit." The words had hardly left his lips when one of the boys nearby uttered a cry and fell back with a bullet through his shoulder. He turned to the officer and though tears streamed down his face from the agony of his wound, he smiled weakly and exclaimed, "That's me; give me the chocolate."

This all happened around daybreak. Throughout that day, the night following, and also the next day, we were busily engaged in beating off the German counter-attacks, taking part in minor charges and generally holding the line. For the first three days of that battle there was practically open warfare. Backward and forward we went, meeting attack with counter-attack. The Germans would sweep upon us in massed formation and we would be ordered into No-man's-land to meet them there and fight it out with the bayonet. So it went on. In the words of the soldier, it was three days of bayonet work.

How we managed to hold those lines I hardly know. According to all the rules of warfare we were licked. The Germans should literally have



walked through our lines to Calais and the Channel ports. Outnumbered ten to one (there were one hundred and twenty thousand German infantry opposed to twelve thousand Canadians), fighting an enemy fully prepared, we were left without artillery support. Our guns had all been put out of action in the opening bombardment.

The Germans had poured a terrific fire upon our trenches from the guns of their marine artillery (some of which I saw after I was captured). Experts say that the enemy sent over thirty shells a minute, night and day, during those three days, while our guns were unable to reply.

Added to this we faced the horror of poison gas. We had no gas masks and our only protection was handkerchiefs and pieces of our uniforms which we dipped into the muddy water of shell holes and placed in our mouths.

It was said that we saved the situation. By fighting in such a determined manner we put up a gigantic bluff and convinced the Germans that behind us there were innumerable reserves and an unlimited number of guns, whereas for three days there was practically nothing. If the Germans could not break the Allied lines then, never will they be able to do so in future.

Perhaps the best explanation of our success was that given by an officer of the British Staff when he said, "The reason the Canadians were able to win at Ypres was because they were new troops, raw recruits. They had not learned enough of modern warfare to know how to retire, so, instead of retiring, they just stayed there and won."

"Stayed there and won." No doubt we did, but we certainly paid the price. The division was cut to pieces; many of our infantry regiments were practically wiped out.

## X

About two hours after our first charge we were ordered into another struggle. It was decided that the survivors of our company should launch an attack on a farm-house position, which lay about a hundred yards to our right across No-man's-land. This farm-house was a machine-gun position, and our commander knew that it would be a splendid position for us to hold, could we capture it. Just before starting the attack we were told that only a few of the enemy were defending the place, and that it would be

comparatively easy to overcome them. Fifty men were chosen for the venture, I among them, and placed in charge of the young officer whom we had nicknamed "Sissy." He was one of the few officers who had survived the first charge. He had fought like a lion, and by dozens of different acts of bravery in the trenches had earned the admiration of every one in the battalion.

We crawled from our trench—"Sissy" leading—and began to advance across No-man's-land toward the farm-house. Again our advance was to be made in short rushes of from ten to twenty yards, with pauses between each rush to drop to the ground and open fire. I happened to be the next man to "Sissy" when the Germans opened up with a murderous machine-gun fire from the windows of the farm-house. "Sissy" at once jumped up and turning round to the rest of us yelled, "Come on, you men, come on!" He had no sooner done so than he fell back shot through the head and was instantly killed. He fell across my body and, as he dropped, he threw his arm around my neck and I could hear his wrist watch ticking in my ear.

In far less time than it takes to tell we were almost annihilated. Out of the fifty who started

in the attack, only five were left. To go on was useless, so we lay in the open and kept quite still, pretending to be dead. We were forced to lie there for more than an hour until the machine-gun fire died down. All that time, "Sissy" lay across my body and his watch kept on ticking. It was most gruesome and the suspense of it all was terrible. Later we managed to crawl back into our trench, and reported what had happened. Only five survivors out of fifty sufficiently told the tale, and it was decided that to take the farmhouse position was out of the question.

When darkness came we were still hanging on, although our numbers had been greatly reduced and we were getting weak from lack of food. We had been fighting for more than twenty-four hours without anything to eat or drink. During the whole three days of the battle we received no rations whatsoever and had simply to fight without when the "iron rations" were consumed.

## XI

At midnight I was sent back with a fatigue party to gather up the spare ammunition and kits from the men who had become casualties in the

first charge. It was most gruesome work, and I was glad that I had a chum along with me. This was Tom Ridout, taken prisoner the next day. I remember saying to Tom, "Gee! I don't mind having to search our own fellows, but these French natives are awful." Lying all over the field were numbers of the Turcos who had suffered in the gas attack. Their bodies were distended and their eyes staring, and one could see from the manner in which they were lying that theirs had been a terrible death.

We had been searching for about an hour when I heard a groan a short distance away and went over to investigate. I found that it came from a boy named Wardell, one of my best chums. He had been shot through the leg in the first charge and then, while lying helpless on the field, a German sniper had shot him in the back. "Why," I gasped, "how is it that you are here, Wardell? The stretcher-bearers should have picked you up long ago." I shall never forget his reply, it was so typical of him. "Aw, never mind me, did you drive out those —— Huns?" he asked. "Oh, yes," I replied, and then I knelt down beside him and tried to bandage up his wounds, meanwhile telling him of the attack and



the manner in which we had taken the German trenches.

He was in terrible agony from his wounds and I realized then that there was very little hope of his recovery. He wanted to know where the stretcher-bearers were, and I assured him that they would soon arrive and that he would be taken to a hospital and eventually sent to England. To cheer him up I went on to describe some of the good times he would have when he reached Blighty. "Blighty be d——d," he said, "I don't want to go there; I want to stay here and have it out with Fritz with the bayonet." It was a wonderful spirit that he showed. There he was—helpless, terribly wounded, in awful agony—yet his only thought was to get back into the fighting.

Time was passing, and I had to get back into the trenches, so, with a parting cheery word, I left him. When I reached the trenches, I reported that Wardell was lying out there, wounded and in need of the stretcher-bearers. I was informed that all the stretcher-bearers had been killed and that it would be impossible to get him away. Poor Wardell died later in a dressing station behind the German lines.

## XII

I was then detailed to form one of a party who were to dig a new line of trenches, and it was while doing this that I was wounded in the head. It was due entirely to my own carelessness. Many of our boys owe wounds or death to this same cause. There were about forty in the party, but we had just five picks and shovels among us with which to do the work. This meant that only five men at a time could dig their own section of trench. They then had to pass the picks and shovels on to the next five men. We commenced to dig, all the time being subjected to the fire of the Germans, while continuously star-shells were sent up.

A star-shell is fired from a pistol and when it reaches a height of about twenty feet in the air it bursts like a rocket into a bright flame, lighting up an area of about fifty feet. As soon as a star-shell is sent up, you drop to the ground and take cover, for if a sniper happens to see you by the light of the star-shell, he will at once open fire. No matter where you are, therefore, you drop; into a muddy shell hole with a few feet of water if necessary, for it is better to get a little wet than to become a casualty.

We had been digging for some time when the Germans began to send up star-shells. Digging operations ceased at once and all took cover. We were very anxious to get the trench dug, however, as we wanted some kind of protection. A shovel came along to me and I commenced to dig. No sooner had I started than up went another star-shell. This sort of thing continued for about a half-an-hour. As soon as I commenced to dig, star-shells were sent up and I had to take cover again. I did not mind in the least, but the man on my left did. He was anxious to get the shovel so that he could dig his part of the trench and secure protection. Shortly afterwards he made remarks to the effect that I was afraid of German star-shells, or I would continue digging. "Afraid, am I? Well, I'll show you," I replied. "Wait till the next one comes. I won't duck; you see." It was a foolish thing to say and a much more foolish one to do. When the next star-shell went up, I just continued digging. I must have been seen by a German sniper, for the next thing that I remember was feeling a crash upon my head and I fell back in the trench. A bullet had struck me on the side of the head, causing just a slight wound. I was lucky.

Another half inch and this would never have been written.

Just before I lost consciousness I heard the man on my left say, "Gibbons got it." (That is the remark we had all used when a man was hit.) The thought then flashed across my mind that they were a cold-blooded lot; they did not seem to care whether I had got it or not. I had seen several other fellows killed and wounded, and had passed just the same remark, but when I got it myself, I thought that the whole regiment should weep. The boys tell me that it was two hours before I regained consciousness, but to me it seemed but a few minutes. The wound I had received was not serious, so I was able to continue fighting, to "Carry On," as we say, throughout that night and the next day.

### XIII

When day broke on that next fateful morning (April 24th) we discovered that we were left in an isolated position right at the point of the salient, and that the enemy had worked round on both our flanks, cutting us off on three sides. Our numbers had been reduced to less than one

hundred. Realizing that we were in a hopeless position, with ammunition almost exhausted and without hopes of getting more, we determined to sell our lives dearly.

Our major (Mr. Kirkpatrick) received word to "Hang on," to which he replied, "Hanging on nicely, thank you." He told us that we must hold the line at all costs and that reinforcements were coming. How that one sentence inspired us! We fought with superhuman energy, expecting those reinforcements. During the short lulls in the fighting we would look back anxiously over the St. Julien field, look for those reinforcements, hope for them, yes, pray for them. Had they reached us, we should have been saved. But it was not to be. The reinforcements never arrived, and we were left—cut off.

After literally blowing to pieces the battalions on our left and right flanks, the Germans advanced again and formed a line of trenches directly in our rear, leaving us surrounded on all sides. It was then seen that the position was hopeless. Seven times the Germans charged us, and seven times we managed to drive them back. For three hours we fought out this position, fighting back to back, but at the end of that time



every round of ammunition was gone; there was not a single round among us. The Germans soon saw that our firing had ceased and swept down upon us. We few survivors fell into their hands and became prisoners of war. We had lost our trench; we had lost the position, but we had achieved our object. We had played our part as the Sacrifice Companies. We had held up the German advance long enough to enable the Allies in our rear to form new lines, to consolidate their battered positions and to save the situation.

### CHAPTER III

### FURTHER INTO IT



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### FURTHER INTO IT

#### I

Shortly before the enemy made their last attack upon our trenches I was shot again, this time in the right thigh. The bullet was an explosive one and completely shattered my limb, leaving me lying helpless on the field. Many people deny the truth of the assertion that the Germans used explosive bullets. The statement, however, is quite true. I have seen numbers of our own boys wounded by them, and also numbers of other Allied prisoners in German hospitals who were suffering terrible wounds from explosive bullets. Furthermore, I have at the present moment in my own leg, embedded in the bone, seven pieces of an explosive bullet.

The first thing that I recall after being wounded the second time, was hearing a whistle, a shout, a few commands in German, and finding a German soldier standing over me with an

upraised rifle and bayonet. I thought my last moment had come, but, strange though it may appear, I did not seem to care. I had seen so many other fellows killed that I often wondered why I still lived. After I was wounded the second time I felt quite sure that I would die anyway, and to me that upraised bayonet only meant that the end would come a little sooner. The bayonet was about to descend (I am firmly convinced that the German was about to plunge it into my body) when I screamed and closed my eyes.

When I opened them again, a German officer was bending over me. He must have stopped the soldier as he was in the act of killing me. This officer spoke very good English and began to question me. Some of his questions were "How far is it to Ypres? How far to Calais? What number of troops have you behind the lines?" To all these questions I did not reply, but merely shook my head to signify that I did not know. He then bent closer to me and exclaimed, "Englander, huh?" "No," I replied, "I am a Canadian."

"Canada, eh," he said, "Canadian swine," and he kicked me. He then asked my age.



"Nineteen," I replied. "Why, you are only a boy," he said. "This is a man's war; you should not be here." With that he left me. His manner had seemed rough at the time, but I am sure he had some kindly feelings, for on several occasions afterwards he prevented the soldiers from maltreating me.

Shortly afterwards I was dragged about forty yards behind the German trenches and left lying there helpless in the open field for four days. The greater part of the time I was only semi-conscious on account of the wounds I had received and from the effects of the gas, so I did not realize how the time passed.

The official documents I brought back from Germany show, however, that I was wounded on April 24th, picked up and admitted to the first German field dressing station at Langemarck on the morning of April 28th.

Those were, perhaps, the worst four days of my life. I never expected to live through them. During the whole time I was still under fire, for the fighting was going on all around the place where I was lying. The second night that I lay there British reinforcements arrived to aid the worn-out Canadian troops and launched another

attack upon the position behind which I lay helpless and impotent. I heard our men fighting hand to hand with the Germans and hoped and prayed that they would break through and drive back the Huns. Had they done so, I should have fallen into the hands of our own troops and been carried back behind our own lines. It was not to be. Our men failed to break through and I remained in the hands of the Germans.

In some respects I was very fortunate. I had been captured by the 236th Regiment of Saxon Infantry. Had it been a Prussian regiment I am convinced that my life would not have been spared. Even as it was, the Germans had my life in their hands and made me realize the fact, for the whole of the time I was lying upon that field they played with me as a cat plays with a mouse. A German soldier would come up to me, curse me, kick me a few times, and then pretend to run his bayonet through my body. They took away everything I possessed, even to my boots, buttons and shoulder straps. I had a small gold ring on one of my fingers. I had worn the ring for several years and it could not be removed. Several Germans tried to take it off, but failed. One of them attempted to cut off the finger to get

the ring, but was prevented from doing so by others standing near.

## II

While lying there I saw a great deal of the German organization and efficiency about which I had heard so much. Their Army Medical Corps system was wonderful. No sooner was a man wounded than a stretcher-bearer rushed up to him, even under fire, bandaged up his wounds and placed a tag on one of the buttons of his uniform. Then along would come other stretcher-bearers, examine the tag, and if the man were badly wounded he would be the first one carried away. Their trench digging system was also remarkable. I saw one company dig a trench and prepare a strong position in less than half an hour. To have dug the same kind of trench would have taken us several hours, after which, perhaps, it would not have been as well dug as theirs.

The manner in which the Germans were fed also made a lasting impression on me. Each man seemed to carry sufficient rations for several days. Good rations, too, in those early days, much better than we received. At night their cook-wagons came right on to the fields behind the trenches

and the men in the front line were served with hot soup and coffee. Remember, all this was early in 1915. At that time we had hardly begun to take war seriously; the Germans were prepared in every way.

### III

How I managed to live through those four days I don't know. Why I was not put to death by the Germans I can never understand. A great number of our boys who fell into the hands of the Germans in that battle were bayoneted. I saw, with my own eyes, two of our wounded boys done to death by the Germans. The enemy was very bitter towards us then. It was in this same battle that two Canadian sergeants were crucified by the Germans. And, as I have previously stated, during the whole time I was lying wounded I was subjected to kicks, blows and curses from nearly every German soldier who passed.

Eventually I was picked up by the German stretcher-bearers. Their own men were carried away first, and it was only when the fighting had died down that they began to take away any of the wounded prisoners. I was carried to a

dressing station in the village of Langemarck. (Langemarck had, by this time, fallen into the hands of the Germans.) Arrived there, I was not taken inside, but placed upon a stretcher which lay upon the ground outside and told that I would be picked up by an ambulance. This was April 28th. By this time the British artillery had come up and was pouring a terrific fire of high explosive shells and shrapnel into the German trenches and the towns and villages behind the German lines. Langemarck was subjected to an intense bombardment, and could our gunners only have seen the damage they were doing and the terror they struck into the German hearts, no doubt they would have rejoiced.

Shells were bursting all around the dressing station where I lay and I saw some houses nearby blown to pieces. There were several other wounded prisoners all lying helpless on stretchers, but the Germans made no attempt to put us in a place of shelter or safety.

I noticed a man passing among the wounded, serving drinks and food. As he came nearer to me I was surprised to see that he was wearing a khaki uniform. I spoke to him and found that he was a Canadian soldier, also a prisoner. "Look at



the effect of those shells," he said. "They are ours. Well, our boys are sure giving these Huns hell now, eh?" "Hell is right," I replied; "I hope they keep it up."

Just then a motor ambulance drew up and after a few preliminaries I was placed inside. This ambulance was much bigger than any I had seen used in the Allied armies and was constructed to carry at least a dozen wounded men. There were eight stretchers and seats for the slightly wounded men who were able to take care of themselves. There were several wounded Germans inside the ambulance when I was put in, but as it was dark and I was covered with a blanket, they could not see my uniform nor learn that I was a British prisoner. Had they done so, I imagine that my journey would not have been a very pleasant one.

When at last I arrived at the hospital, I was lifted from the ambulance and placed upon the ground. The blanket was taken off me. Immediately the Germans standing near saw my British uniform.

I think I must have been the first British soldier that many of them had seen, and as my shoulder straps had been cut off, I bore no insignia to show that I was a member of the Canadian Army.

Several German soldiers gathered round me as I lay on the ground and began to curse me roundly in German. Of course, I could not understand what they were saying, but I gathered that they were not passing any loving remarks. Suddenly they all bent forward, shook their fists in my face and in perfect unison shouted, "Gott Strafe England." I knew perfectly what that meant. From their facility it seemed as if the Germans must practise this exclamation as our boys at home practise their college yells.

"Gott Strafe England." Many times in the months to come I was to hear that same remark addressed to myself and other British prisoners. As we passed along the streets of Germany we saw signs upon the walls bearing that same inscription. The women-folk would also stand and scream it at us and show the little German children, kiddies not old enough to understand, how to hold up their fists to the British prisoners and shout "Gott strafe England." We prisoners heard it so often that it became a joke among us. We said that the reason the Germans called upon God so frequently to punish England, was because they realized that they themselves were quite unable to punish England.

It seems that the Germans connect the name of God with everything German. The Kaiser continually speaks of "Me und Gott." On the belts worn by the German soldiers is the inscription "Gott mit uns" (God with us), and on the German helmet is inscribed, "Mit Gott und dem Vaterland" (With God and the Fatherland). "With God!" Was ever a nation proved by atrocious acts to be so far removed from God!

## IV

The hospital to which I was sent was in the Flemish village of Handzaeme, situated about fifteen miles from Ypres. I was not taken *into* the hospital, however. After a preliminary examination by one of the doctors I was removed to an adjoining stable and thrown down on a bundle of straw. Lying all around me were other poor wounded prisoners, mostly Frenchmen and Belgians. While there we received very little attention from the Germans. It was pitiful to hear the poor fellows, lying there helpless and in terrible pain, groaning and screaming both night and day. When one or other of the German soldiers condescended to give us a little attention, he usually accompanied everything he did with

curses and blows. Several of the unfortunate prisoners died in that stable simply from lack of proper attention.

I was left there without the slightest medical attention for a period of twelve days. Therefore, it was sixteen days from the time I was wounded before I received medical treatment for my wounds. It would be hard to imagine the condition that I was in. For three days I had been fighting in mud and rain, had lain upon the battle field for four days and was covered from head to foot with mud, blood and filth.

In that condition I was left lying on the dirty straw in the stable. Not even my filthy uniform had been removed. One leg of my trousers had been torn away and a rough field-dressing tied around the wound, but I feel sure that this dressing slipped off, and my wound (a terrible gash on the front and back of my thigh) was left exposed. I was unable to see if this were so as I was quite helpless. I could not even raise my head without my shattered thigh-bone causing me excruciating pain. The wound in my head never received the slightest medical attention. I was fortunate in that it healed up of itself. The agony and pain that I suffered during those twelve days can never

be described, and had the Germans not continually given me morphine I don't believe that I should have lived through them. I wanted to die; I prayed for death to come to me and to come quickly. But if I lived, I felt that I would demand three things of life—to be without pain, to be able to sleep, and to have sufficient food to eat, and with those three, be entirely satisfied.

## V

At the end of those sixteen days of agony, I was carried into the hospital to have an operation performed upon my wounded limb. They took me to the operating room and I was laid on the floor upon a stretcher, to await my turn at the operating table. I waited for more than an hour, and during that time I saw some awful operations performed. The doctor seemed to have no human feelings at all and treated the wounded German soldiers just as roughly as the wounded prisoners. I saw that doctor amputate the leg of a wounded man. He then came over to where I was lying, showed me the leg and placed it on the ground, not two feet away from me and in plain view. This sight terrified me and made me realize that



I could hope for little mercy or kindly treatment from him.

At last I was lifted upon the operating table and my filthy clothes were removed. The doctor and several orderlies stood over me and preparations were made for an operation. However, before the ether was administered, the doctor began to talk to me. He spoke perfect English, as most of the German officers do. This man, as I found out afterwards, had practised as a doctor in London, England, previous to the war. "Where were you wounded?" he asked. "At Ypres," I replied. "Ha, at Ypern. So?" and he smiled. "Well, well, you Canadians fought in your own graves, is it not so?" I did not answer. "But why did you leave your own country to come here to Europe and fight us?" he went on. "Because we are patriots and love the Mother Country, England," I answered.

At this he got quite angry and almost shouted, "Love England! Why do you love that nation of grocery clerks? Bah!" Again I did not answer. Then he seemed to work himself into a great rage, and waving his arms around and gesticulating in a frantic manner, he began to act as though he were making a public address. I believe that what

he said was more for the benefit of the nearby soldiers and orderlies, than myself. Why did England enter the war? She was jealous of Germany's commercial power. England pays hired assassins to fight for her. You men came from Canada, not to fight for your Motherland, but to fight for the gold that England pays you. Murderers, assassins! But wait, Germany will be victorious; England and France will be crushed. When the war is finished Germany will be "Ueber Alles."

After this, the soldiers crowded closer to me, shaking their fists in my face, cursing me and England and Canada for several minutes. It was not a very pleasant experience to say the least. A few minutes later the anæsthetic was applied and I began to fade away into unconsciousness. My last thoughts before passing away were: "I wonder if they will kill me? Will they cut off my leg? What will they do?" Then all became blank, and the operation was performed.

## VI

I came to a few hours afterwards and found myself lying in a bed in one of the wards of the hospital. What the German doctor did to my leg



THE AUTHOR AS HE APPEARED ON HIS  
ARRIVAL IN ENGLAND.

Note the Crippled Right Leg.



when he operated upon me I do not know. It was found, however, upon my return to England and subsequent examination with the aid of X-rays, that the broken bone of my thigh had been completely overlapped, thus causing my one leg to be five and a half inches shorter than the other. My foot and ankle had also been wrenched and twisted by the German doctors, so that the foot was turned completely round. When I looked down I saw the bottom of my foot instead of the top. Furthermore, several nerves in the upper part of my leg had been severed and I had lost the use of the limb entirely. Doctors in England and in Canada contend that it was a deliberate attempt on the part of the Germans to cripple me permanently. They also say that had I been attended by our own doctors at first, I should have been fit for active service again within a few months from the time I was wounded. As a result of the German treatment I returned home crippled for life. It is wholly due to the skill of Canadian surgeons that I am able to walk at all. So much for German *Kultur*.

## VII

The hospital at Handzaeme, prior to the war, had been a Belgian convent. In one part of the



building a number of the Belgian nuns were still living. After my operation I was put in a room in which a number of wounded German soldiers and Allied prisoners lay. The Germans were placed on one side of the room, the Allied prisoners on the other.

Each evening three of the Belgian nuns came into the room to visit us. They went to the Germans first, and as they spoke Flemish, which is similar to German, they held a conversation with them. We saw the nuns go to each man and, after talking to him for a short while, kneel down by his bedside and pray for him. So they passed on, from bed to bed, talking and praying for each man as they went. Then they reached the side where we lay. They came to us and talked to us in Flemish. We understood no Flemish and they understood no English, but they knelt down by our bed-sides and prayed for us in their own language. All the time that they did so, they turned around to see if they were being watched. When they found that they were not being watched, they quietly placed an apple, an orange, a piece of chocolate or some such small comfort underneath our bed-clothes. In doing this, I feel sure they took their lives in their



REVERSE.



OBVERSE.

LUSITANIA MEDAL.



hands, for it was only a short time afterwards that Miss Edith Cavell, the British nurse, was shot by the Germans for doing practically the same thing. "Aiding British prisoners of war!" Yet those women took the risk, just to help us. That, I think, is a splendid illustration of the wonderful spirit that has been shown by the women of Belgium.

## VIII

I happened to be a prisoner in this hospital on May 7th, 1915, the day the *Lusitania* was sunk. I thus got the German version of the atrocious deed and came to understand their point of view in the matter.

The Germans struck a medal in commemoration of the sinking, and I have one of those medals in my possession. The medal is perhaps the best proof we have that the sinking of the vessel was deliberately planned, for it bears the inscription, "The Giant Steamship, *Lusitania*, sunk by a German submarine, May 5th, 1915." The medals were dated May 5th, and issued on that date, so that they dated and issued the medals two days before the ship was actually sunk. How I gained

possession of this medal I have never as yet informed even my dearest friends.

The manner in which we heard of the sinking of the *Lusitania* was dramatic in its intensity. One day we noticed great excitement among the Germans. Outside the hospitals we could hear bells ringing continually, and the Germans cheering as if celebrating some great event. Small groups of soldiers would congregate in the hospital and talk together in a very excited manner. We surmised that the Germans had won a great victory. As previously stated, the doctor in charge of the hospital spoke very good English. Occasionally he came into the prisoners' ward and told us a little of the war news, but always from the German viewpoint. On the evening of May 7th he came in and one of the British prisoners asked him what all the excitement was about. The following are the very words used by that doctor in reply—I have always remembered them. He said: "Do you know the *Lusitania*?" "Why, yes," I replied. "It is one of our big ships." "Yes," he said, and with an excited gesture. Then pointing to the ground he continued, "We Germans have downed her." Then raising his right hand and pointing it toward the heavens, he said in a very

proud manner, "Germany is the greatest nation in the world; thank God I am a German." With that he left us to think over what he had said.

We were greatly excited, and turning to the rest of the boys, I said, "Did you hear that? The Germans have sunk the *Lusitania*; perhaps there were some Americans on board. That will surely bring America into the war on our side. Why, it will soon end now and we shall be sent back to our own country."

Shortly afterwards the doctor came back into the room, and I asked him if the vessel had been sunk on its way to or from America. "Coming from America," he said. "Were there any Americans on board?" I asked. "Yes, no doubt there were quite a number," was his reply. "Did you save any of them?" I questioned. In no uncertain tone he said, "A submarine could not save any." I then ventured to suggest that this would cause America to declare war upon Germany. "America," he sneered; "America will protest; but that is all that America ever does."

It is quite easy to see from the foregoing the attitude the Germans had towards the United States. Yes, but that was in 1915. No doubt their opinion of America has changed considerably



by this time. I only hope that same doctor is alive to-day, for I think that he and all other Germans will now have realized, to their sorrow, that America can and America has done far more than protest.

## IX

During the whole time I remained in this hospital I did not see any German nurses. Those in charge of the hospital were members of the "Field Hospital Corps," composed of fighting men who had been detailed to hospital duty. One of these told me that the reason soldiers were in charge was because the hospital was near the firing line. In case the German lines were broken, they could immediately take up arms and take part in the fighting. Many of these men were very bitter towards us. They never missed an opportunity of cursing us, beating us and making our lives as unpleasant as possible.

While in hospital I suffered continuously the most terrible pain from my shattered limb and from my twisted foot. I remember little of what happened the greater part of the time, as the orderlies and doctors administered morphine to me in very liberal quantities. Had it not been for this, I feel sure I would not have been able to endure. My

broken limb was not placed in a splint or an extension, but was simply bandaged roughly and left without a new dressing for a week or ten days at a time. How the wound in the thigh ever healed up is beyond my comprehension, as sometimes, when the bandages were removed, it appeared to be but a mass of putrid, raw, gangrened flesh.

## X

After I had been in the hospital at Handzaeme for a few weeks it became apparent that the Germans feared an Allied drive in the Ypres sector, for they began to move all wounded, both prisoners and Germans, to hospitals farther behind their lines. It thus happened that I was sent to another hospital, situated this time in a town called Thourout, which is about twelve miles from Ostend in Belgium. The treatment I received in this second hospital was much worse than in the former, and many times I wished I was back in Handzaeme, bad as it had been.

It was at this hospital in Thourout that I came under the care of German nurses for the first and, I am very thankful to say, the last time. It can hardly be conceived by right-minded people that women could be as cruel to wounded men as those

nurses were to us. When on duty in the ward in which the prisoners were kept, they would hardly give us any attention at all, and that little very reluctantly. These women poured curses in a far worse manner than the men upon us and the Allies, but more especially upon their hated enemy—England.

The worst aspects of our experiences happened when we were carried into the operating theatre to have our wounds dressed. Here, two nurses would usually be on duty. Those days became a nightmare to me and I looked forward to them with dread. I would be carried in and laid upon the operating table. One of the nurses would come to me and, shaking her fist in my face, would exclaim: "Schwein Englander!" to the other occupants of the room, to inform them that here was one of the accursed English—one of the men who had fought against them, and had been killing beloved Germans to gain English gold.

She would then proceed to remove the bandages from my leg, all the time calling down curses upon me and England. She would wrench off the bandages in the roughest manner, causing me terrible pain. If I winced with the pain, she would laugh and sneer and turn to the others and

say that the brave Englisher could not bear even a little pain. When it came to removing the piece of bandage directly over the wound, which usually adhered firmly to my leg, she would be especially rough. While tearing off this piece of bandage she would laugh, as if torturing a helpless prisoner were the best joke of all.

We all breathed a prayer of thankfulness when, two weeks later, the medical unit in charge, which happened to be one of the regular Medical Corps units of the German Army, was ordered to the Russian Front. This meant that the nurses who had treated us with such cruelty would also have to go.

The hospital was then taken over by one of the units of the Field Hospital Corps, similar to the unit which had been in charge of the hospital at Handzaeme. From this time on, until I was being sent back on the train from Germany to Holland, I did not see or receive any more attention from German nurses. Judging from the little experience I had of them, I am not the least bit sorry.

## XI

Great changes were made in the method of conducting the hospital from the time the Field

Hospital Corps came in and took charge. Some of these changes, however, were for the worse and meant that we received more cruel treatment. For example, the new doctor was a young man, who held a very high rank in the German Army. He was, perhaps, the most fiendishly cruel human being I have ever had the misfortune to meet. He, like many of the German officers, spoke excellent English.

In one room in the hospital lay seven wounded prisoners. Each one of us had been badly wounded in one or both limbs. Every second or third morning the doctor would come into the room, supposedly to examine our wounds. We lay in a row along one side of the ward. The doctor would go to the first man, take hold of his wounded limb and deliberately twist the foot or the knee and wrench the limb in the most terrible manner, causing the unfortunate prisoner to writhe and scream in his agony.

At that, the doctor would smile and pass on to the next man and torture him in a similar manner. Then on to the next and the next, right along the row, twisting and pulling our limbs, striking our wounds, torturing each one as he went. It is hard to imagine the condition that we were in



after he had finished with us. We would be all screaming and moaning from the pain he had caused. I was the fifth in the row, so I always knew when my turn came and what to expect. On leaving, the doctor would turn as he reached the door, sneer and say, "Yes, yes, my friends; that will make you realize that you are at war!"

The suspense under which we lived between this doctor's visits was almost unbearable, and the dread of having him come into the room began to tell upon our minds. It was on his third visit that I had a narrow escape from losing my life.

The doctor was in the room torturing us in his usual manner. He had just finished with three of the boys and I knew it would be but a few minutes before my turn came. After what appeared to my fevered imagination to be hours of waiting he at last arrived at the foot of my bed. Taking a firm hold of my foot, he began to twist the limb. I bore it as long as ever I could but the agony became too great and I burst out, "You devil, why don't you torture your own men as you torture us? You are a typical German; you torture and maltreat those who are helpless and unable to hit back."



The words had hardly left my lips when I realized the terrible mistake I had made and the danger that I had, without doubt, placed myself in. I began to feel afraid, terribly afraid, and burst out crying. The doctor did not utter a word, but just dropped my foot on to the bed, turned and left the room. An orderly standing near came to me and said, "So, you Schwein Engländer, you speak to an officer in that manner. Well, you will be shot."

Personally, I fully expected to be shot or killed in some other manner for what I had done. Nevertheless I tried to console myself by thinking that even death would be preferable to living in that hospital in the hands of the Germans, continually tortured and ill-treated. Strange to say, nothing more came of the incident and the doctor did not even mention it when next he came into the room a few days later. The next day, though, one of the German orderlies informed me that I had only just escaped being shot.

## XII

A number of the orderlies in the hospital, members of the Field Hospital Corps, had been students previous to the war and seemed to be

well educated men. I had frequent talks with a number of them on the subject of the war and the ultimate outcome of the struggle. (These men also spoke English.) It was surprising to see the confidence they possessed at that time. All were absolutely convinced that the war would end very soon and that Germany would be completely victorious. The propaganda that had been spread by the German Government undoubtedly had its effect also, for these orderlies told us that the Allies were being beaten to their knees, and driven out of France and Belgium. They also stated that the Allied soldiers were throwing down their arms and crying for mercy everywhere to the conquering Germans. These men were absolutely firm in their belief; every story to them was quite true; they never missed an opportunity of impressing upon us the invincibility of Germany.

It was surprising also to learn the great confidence they had in their submarines and Zeppelins. We were told that the Allied navies had been driven from the seas by the German navy; that every transport attempting to cross the ocean had been sunk by German submarines. They also informed us that England was being

starved into submission by the German blockade and that most of the important cities of Great Britain had been destroyed completely by bombs dropped from Zeppelins. To add weight to these statements they showed us several pictures in the German illustrated papers. These pictures showed such cities as London, Birmingham, Manchester, Newcastle, Edinburgh, and Glasgow in flames, with buildings completely destroyed, supposedly by German bombs.

Hearing this kind of news continually—morning, noon and night—we came almost to believe these reports. When I at last returned to England, it was quite a time before I was convinced that after all the Allies could and would win the war. Arrived in London and Birmingham, I expected to find those cities destroyed as I had seen them pictured in the German newspapers.

Imagine my surprise and relief when I found that little or no damage had been done by the Zeppelins. I found out that Birmingham, Newcastle, Edinburgh and Glasgow had never even had a German Zeppelin or airship pass overhead, and, most certainly, no bombs had ever been dropped there. Yet the Germans believed all that lying propaganda and their papers printed those

fictitious pictures. Is it, then, any wonder that the German people and soldiers were convinced that the end of the war was near and that victory would crown the German cause?

### XIII

We seven wounded prisoners were an unhappy group. The two unfortunate French soldiers could not talk any English, and as we knew little or no French we could not hold much conversation with them and found out very little of their previous history.

One of the poor fellows had lost a leg and an arm and the other had a badly shattered leg which was set in such a manner that it was no less than ten inches short. He had obviously been a splendid specimen of manhood previous to the war, but now he was crippled for life by the inhuman treatment of the Huns. We never even learned his name, but just called him Napoleon. He seemed to like the name, however, and evidently was proud that we had chosen such a name for him. Occasionally he managed to hobble around on crutches, but it was pitiful to see him, with one leg dangling useless at his side because of the barbarity of the Huns.

## XIV

We five Canadians, however, became fast chums. There were Private French from Quebec, Private Holyoak from Toronto, Annaud from Victoria, Robertson from Calgary, and myself. Annaud and Holyoak had received terrible wounds at Ypres, from which they subsequently died. French recovered from his wounds, but was left with both his legs permanently stiff. Robertson lost his leg from the thigh. He was very bitter toward the German doctors, as he had been wounded in the ankle and considered that they could have amputated his leg below the knee instead of at the hip. He was no doubt right in his contention, as I know personally at least a dozen men who were prisoners who tell the same story exactly.

Being helpless as we were, there was practically nothing that we could do to pass away the time except talk. In the weeks that I spent at Thourout hospital I learned the life history of each of the other four and they learned mine. We would have given anything for a book; given anything to see something printed in our own language. To have been allowed to read would have been indeed a Godsend to us.



One of the German orderlies did not seem to be as bitter towards us as the rest and so, one day, I asked him if it would be possible to get us a book or something to read. He said that he did not think so as the Government had gathered in all English literature and everything else that was printed in English. They had absolutely forbidden the circulation of anything printed in the hated language. A few days afterwards, though, this orderly brought me a copy of "Faust" in English, but printed in the form of poetry. The story was not the least bit interesting in that form, but we absolutely devoured it. One of us would read it, then pass it along to the next man; he would read it and again pass it on. So it went from one to another of us. I believe I read the book through at least a dozen times.

## XV

On four different occasions German Army chaplains came to the hospital to visit us. We wished many times that they would stay away, as the orderlies and soldiers seemed far more bitter towards us after these visitations. The first chaplain to visit us came to me and began to ask



me questions about the war and also about Canada. Then he asked the eternal question that was put by practically every German with whom I came into contact, "But why did you come to fight? Why did Canada send her troops over the ocean to fight in a war that was none of her concern?" I tried to explain, going into the same details that I had done at least a hundred times before, "that Canadians were patriots; our Motherland needed help; she was in danger; we heard the call, and so came to her aid." He was just the same as the others, he could not understand it. "But you volunteered," he went on; "you were not forced to come into this war. Even your own Government does not force you to become soldiers. Perhaps you come for adventure?" I did not answer, so he asked, "What money do you receive from the English Government as pay for fighting?" "Nothing," I answered; "we receive our pay as soldiers from Canada." "How much?" he queried. "One dollar and ten cents a day," I said. He thought this over for a few minutes and then almost screamed at me, "Four marks a day?" I nodded. "Murderers," he hissed, and then called for the orderlies and soldiers to come near.

What he said to these men I could not know, but he went on addressing them in a frantic manner, continually pointing at the other four Canadians and myself. He was in a terrible rage and was fast working the others into the same pitch of excitement. Every few minutes he would point to me and I would hear the exclamation, "Vier Mark ein Tag" (four marks a day). He was no doubt telling the same story as the doctor, namely, that the Canadians were nothing more nor less than a group of cold-blooded adventurous murderers, who were hired by England to come to Europe and kill the German people. This was the attitude that all the Germans seemed to take towards us and I heard this same accusation many, many times while a prisoner.

Shortly after this chaplain went away—we were not sorry to see him go—and we at once noticed the changed manner in the orderlies and soldiers. His words had the desired effect. The three following chaplains who visited us acted in very much the same manner. No doubt they called themselves men of God and thought they were doing good in the world. They were men of god—the German god of lust, barbarity, and

ruthlessness. I cannot imagine a chaplain of the Allied armies acting towards German prisoners as these German chaplains acted towards us.

## XVI

Every few days a number of high German officers would come to the hospital and naturally they had to be shown the helpless wounded prisoners. When these officers passed our beds we had to raise our hands to our heads as a salute. It was absolutely ridiculous for men lying in bed, as we were, to be expected to salute, *still we had to do it*; woe betide us if we refused. The strange part of it all was that these officers seemed pleased to receive our salutes and they would gravely salute in return. Their parting shot to us usually was, "England ist Kaput" (England is done for).

## XVII

Thourout must have been a base for one of the German armies, for we continually heard troops marching outside the hospital. Sometimes they were led by military bands, as we heard some really splendid and inspiring music as they went

by. Frequently regiments would pass singing. The German soldiers do sing well, and I was told by a German officer that the singing was part of a German soldier's training. The songs we heard were usually "Die Wacht am Rhein" or "Deutschland, Deutschland ueber Alles."

## XVIII

Near to the hospital there was undoubtedly a base for the Zeppelins also, for oftentimes in the evening we could hear the whirr of giant motors, and one of the orderlies would tell us that more Zeppelins had started on their way to bomb the towns of England. One night the whirr of the motors was far louder than usual, and we also heard a great deal of cheering from soldiers outside the hospital. One of the orderlies came running in to the room greatly excited. "Zeppelins," he yelled. "Fifteen of them on their way to bomb Dunkirk." I think that the Allied airmen knew that Thourout was a Zeppelin base, for they seemed to raid the town almost every day, dropping a great many bombs. Many of these bombs fell quite close to the hospitals, and sometimes we wondered if we were going to be killed by a bomb dropped by one of our own airmen. Luckily

none of the bombs struck the hospital. Our men had not learned the German art of bombing hospitals and the Red Cross.

## XIX

I had been in Thourout hospital for several weeks when it was discovered that I was at last fit to travel to one of the prison camps in Germany. To this day I remember the horrors of that terrible journey from Thourout to Giessen prison camp; the memory of it will be with me always, I am afraid. One afternoon I was placed upon a stretcher and carried to a railroad depot. There I was put alongside several other wounded prisoners—all helpless and on stretchers—who also were to travel to the prison camp in Germany. We were placed on one of the platforms and had to wait till late that night for the train to arrive. We were all lifted on board and the journey started.

There were altogether about two hundred wounded prisoners on the train—most of them quite helpless—all bound for the same destination. The train was an old, broken-down affair and the accommodation was atrocious. There were small compartments which would ordinarily



have been for six passengers, but we were seriously overcrowded when ten men were put into each compartment. We, who were unable to walk or take care of ourselves, were laid on bundles of straw on the floor. I travelled in this manner for a day and a half until we reached Aix-la-Chapelle. My companions were French soldier prisoners, and as we did not understand each other's language not very much conversation was held in which I took part.

While passing through Belgium the journey was not so awfully bad. Occasionally, when we stopped at a station for any length of time, the civilian people would give us food and on two occasions we received coffee.

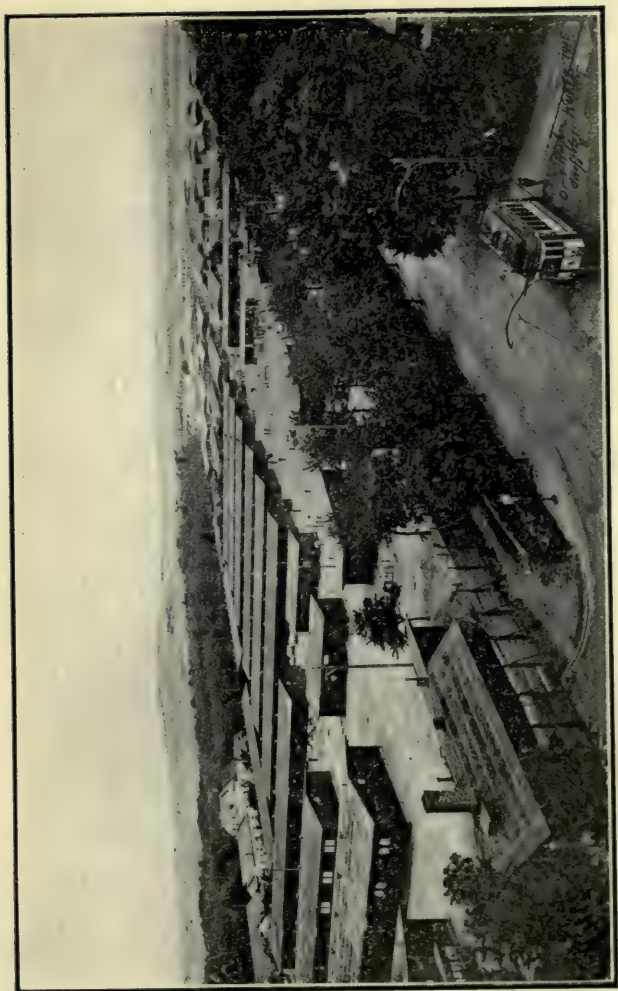
Arrived at Aix-la-Chapelle, which was the first town in Germany at which we stopped, we were taken from the train and herded together in the railroad station. The insults the German civilians and soldiers showered upon us there are beyond description. These people would come near and laugh and sneer at our pitiful conditions. Some would throw stones at us, while others would spit in the faces of those who lay helpless upon the stretchers. Here we again heard more of the now well-known phrase, "Gott strafe England,"



as practically every one of the Germans upon seeing a British uniform would utter this curse.

We were kept in that depot for several hours and then placed on board another train to continue our journey. We were now passing through Germany. Had we not known this, it would soon have been impressed upon us by the manner in which the people acted at every town where the train stopped. As I was travelling on straw thrown on the bottom of the train I could not see very much, but I could hear the boos and curses of the people as they passed near the train. The journey from Aix-la-Chapelle to Giessen took about twenty-six hours. During all that time the only food we received was about four ounces of black bread, so we were in a pitiful state when we at last arrived at our destination. We crossed the famous River Rhine at Cologne.

I had often wished to see the Rhine, and many times after joining the Army I had visions of myself crossing with my regiment at the head of the victorious Allied Army. Little did I think that I would cross the Rhine as a prisoner in the arms of a bulky German guard. This man was a typical German, proud of his country and of that famous river. As we were crossing he lifted me



GIESSEN PRISON CAMP.



up to enable me to look out of the window of the train and see for myself what the Rhine was like. To me the river itself was beautiful, but the thoughts the scene sent rushing through my mind as I considered my pitiful plight were almost overwhelming.

## XX

It was around midnight when the train at last pulled into the depot at Giessen. Motor ambulances were waiting to convey the stretcher cases to the prison camp and I was put in one and whisked away. Eventually we arrived at the camp and I was carried to one of the huts assigned as a hospital, put on a rough bed and left to myself. Had it not been that I saw so many of the boys who were in a much worse condition than myself, I believe I should have broken down completely.

"A prisoner of war." "A prisoner of war." That phrase kept passing through my mind every minute. The sound of people's feet as they walked along seemed to beat time to it and drive it home into my brain. "A prisoner of war." Yes, here I was in a prison camp in Germany. My position as a prisoner had not weighed upon

me until I arrived at Giessen, but from the moment I entered the camp, the mortification of it all overcame me.

About an hour afterwards the new arrivals were given a bowl of the most ghastly mixture imaginable, which the Germans called soup. It was simply horrible, but as most of us were famished we were grateful even for that and ate eagerly. I slept very little that night, for several reasons. Firstly, because my wounds were causing me so much pain by reason of the hard travelling I had done. The journey to Giessen had taken nearly three days and the continual jolting of the train had caused my bandages to work loose. They had almost fallen off, leaving the wounds exposed. Secondly, because I was so worried about the ultimate outcome of it all; and, lastly, because the men all around me were crying out in their agony.

## XXI

Next morning I was put through a regular "Third Degree" by two of the German non-commissioned officers regarding my military career. I had to tell, when and where I had enlisted, and *why*? My regiment, division, and

army corps. When, where and how, I was wounded and captured, and through what hands I had passed since becoming a *Guest of the Kaiser* (a prisoner of war).

This cross-questioning, we learned, took place every time a new batch of prisoners came to the camp. Before the German non-coms. came around to us, prisoners who had been in the camp for some time warned us of what was coming and told us not to give the Germans any military information and to say as little as possible. Needless to remark I opine we all acted upon this advice. I, myself, told the Germans the most wonderful story of my career, all of it false. For example, according to my story, I belonged to a regiment that, up to that time, had not left Canada. To a division that had been sent to India, and worst of all, but to me best of all, I told them that I enlisted because I was forced to do so. The Germans, of course, kept all these records, but from the varied stories they were told, I do not imagine they gained any information of much military value.

Later that day I was carried into another hut and told that I was in Company 6, and in Hospital M.G.K., Giessen.



Many weary weeks I spent in this same hut; it was a hospital in name only. The medical attention we received was deliberately negligent; in fact, many of the poor boys received hardly any attention at all, but were left for days, even weeks, in the most awful condition, with badly bandaged, dirty, festering wounds. Left lying there helpless; many of them to die as a result of this inhuman neglect. There were no nurses or orderlies to attend to our needs. A few of the French prisoners had been detailed for hospital duty, but they had so much work to do that it was out of the question for them to give us proper attention.

The hut was built to accommodate about fifty beds, and these were so close that we could touch the man on either side. Our beds were rough wooden structures upon which a bundle of straw had been thrown and the covering was old rags that had been sewn together, probably by other prisoners. Imagine trying to sleep or rest in an easy position, with an open wound, upon a bundle of straw. Many of the unfortunate prisoners in that hut had terrible wounds in their backs, yet they had to lie upon the straw also. This straw would work itself between the bandages and cause

great irritation, sometimes get into the wound, causing excruciating pain.

About twice a week the doctor came to visit us and see whose wounds needed dressing. All our wounds needed dressing, but he would pick out only five or six, attend to their bandages and then go away, so that sometimes our wounds would not receive a new dressing or clean bandaging for ten or twelve days on end. On this account many of the prisoners ultimately lost their limbs, for the wounds would fester from the dirty bandages, gangrene would set in and the limb have to be amputated.

Upon being picked out by the doctor for a new dressing, we would be carried to one end of the hut, a screen placed around, and then the doctor would proceed in no gentle manner to tear off the old bandages and put on clean or half-clean ones. All the dirty bandages were saved and washed and the bed patients would be given the task of straightening them out and rolling them again ready for use. The shortage of cotton fabric was apparent, as the Germans frequently used a paper composition for bandaging.

I had been a prisoner for several months before I was able to get up and hobble around on

crutches. I call them crutches, as they served the purpose, but they were just rough pieces of board which had been cut to reach from my shoulders to the ground. Some of the crutches in Giessen Camp were grotesque in appearance. Our captors did not supply the wounded with crutches, so we used anything we could secure which would give support. Pieces of wood, planking, or board were utilized, and I have even seen men supporting themselves upon lengths of steel or iron rods with a piece of rag tied on the end to make it more comfortable under the arms.

## XXII

After I was able to get around I found that the time passed more quickly, as I could go into the court-yard and speak to some of the other British prisoners. (Most of the men of my hut were Belgians, French and Russians, and I could not hold much conversation with them.) I thus saw a little more of the camp and got some idea of the place in which I was confined.

It was said at that time that Giessen was one of the best prison camps in Germany, and that prisoners there received far better treatment than any other. This perhaps may have been true, but

if Giessen was one of the best camps, then it is beyond my power to imagine what the others were like.

Giessen was also, we understood, one of the biggest of the German prison camps. The camp consisted of about a thousand huts, each hut having accommodation for forty or fifty prisoners. At the time I was there there were in the camp as prisoners representatives of practically all the nations who were fighting against the Germans. The men of different nationalities, however, were not kept in separate huts, as one would expect, but in each unit were placed a few Belgians, a few French, a few Russians, some native troops, and a number of British prisoners. Their object in doing this was to prevent the prisoners from fraternizing too much and getting together to form cliques or organized mobs.

Alongside of the camp a number of high platforms had been built, which commanded a view of the entire place, and upon these platforms machine guns and small field pieces were mounted. Behind these guns German soldiers were continually on guard. The guns were trained upon the camp, so it would have been an easy matter to suppress any mutiny which might break out

among the prisoners by the simple expedient of turning the guns upon them and wiping them out of existence.

The huts were divided into allotments by barbed wire fences, and beside these fences German guards carrying loaded rifles with fixed bayonets continually paced on duty. We were not allowed even to speak to the prisoners on the other side of the barbed wire fence. When we attempted to do so, we were threatened with the bayonet by one of the guards.

Most of these men who acted as guards and sentries in the camp were old fellows, members of the Landsturm, the class in the German Army chosen for home duty; usually men over fifty-five years of age. They did not interfere with or trouble us very much, and as long as the prisoners behaved they did not seem to mind what happened. The officers and non-commissioned officers, however, were especially bitter toward us and they never missed an opportunity of ill-treating or abusing us in some manner. Every time they passed a British prisoner they would curse him soundly in German and utter terrible imprecations and curses against England.



A strange feature of the whole situation was that the Germans never liked us to appear cheerful in any way. As most people know, Tommy generally manages to be cheerful even when enduring the worst of hardships or living under the most appalling conditions imaginable. He can always give and take a joke; and can always smile. Even in the prison camps of Germany Tommy could smile, trying for the time to forget his troubles.

Occasionally, a number of us would congregate in the court yard and hold a regular pow-wow, telling stories, etc. After a few minutes, perhaps, one of the boys would hum a song that we had sung in happier times. Before long all would join in and have a regular sing-song and forget that we were prisoners. Our singing never lasted very long, though, for as soon as we were heard by one of the German officers or non-coms., over he would rush to the group, when we would receive a sound cursing, perhaps a few blows, and be driven back to our huts, there to remain for the rest of the day as punishment for our attempt at cheerfulness. This attitude in our captors made life almost unbearable, and it seemed to us pretty



rough that we were not allowed to forget our troubles for even a few minutes.

There were several incidents, however, that raised many a laugh among us at the expense of some of the old guards. Many of these men did not understand one word of English. In the morning when they came on duty they would pass through the hut, nod to some of us and exclaim in an almost friendly manner, "Guten Morgen, Kamerad" (good morning, comrade). Our boys, I among them, would gravely acknowledge the nod and, with an innocent expression on our faces, would answer in English, "Go to the d——l, old top!" "To h——l with you," and such expressions. The sentry would pass on, thinking we had said "Good morning" or had passed some remark about the weather. Lucky for us that none who understood English came through the hut at this time.

The Germans did not provide us with any clothing whatsoever, and we were always dressed in rags. The only clothing we had was the ragged uniforms in which we had come from the battle-field or clothing that some were fortunate enough to receive in parcels from home, or from some patriotic society or another.

I have seen men in Giessen Camp fighting and quarrelling among themselves to decide who was to receive the clothing left by some poor unfortunate prisoner who had died in the camp. Had it not been for the parcels of clothing that were sent to the camp by the "Red Cross Society" it is hard to imagine what would have happened. On all our clothes the Germans painted broad yellow stripes so that should any escape we would be recognized by the public as prisoners of war.

During the whole time I spent in Giessen Camp I was practically unable to walk; I could only hobble around slowly on the crutches. On this account I was perhaps fortunate, as I was never placed in any of the working parties and sent out to work.

### XXIII

The men who were in any way fit, however, were forced to take part in all kinds of labours. Some were forced to work in the mines, salt and coal mines generally. Working in these mines for any length of time had a terrible effect on the prisoners, for many returned to the camp absolute physical and mental wrecks. Maniacal laughter would rise from the ones who had broken down and lost their reason under the

strain. Other prisoners were sent to the Eastern or Western Fronts to dig reserve trenches for the German Army. What eventually happened to these men we do not know, as none of them ever returned to the camp.

The worst feature of all, however, was that most of the men who appeared in any way fit were forced to work in the munition factories. Just imagine what that meant to them! They were forced to make shells for our enemies, shells that might kill our own men. Of course, our boys always fought against doing this and many of them suffered terrible tortures and punishments before at last consenting to make them. It was usually useless to rebel, as the Germans had so many methods of breaking the wills of the prisoners and making them do as they desired.

Just before leaving Giessen Camp to come home a group of our boys came to me and gave me this message for the people "back home," "For God's sake tell the people at home that the Germans are forcing us to make ammunition."

#### XXIV

The methods the Germans used in punishing the prisoners and forcing them to work at

munitions and in the mines were cruel in the extreme. There were so many rules and regulations in the camp that it was impossible not to break one or another some time. For the minor offences, such as insolence to a guard or not obeying an order with alacrity, or failing to obey the order in the desired manner, there were such punishments as solitary confinement in a darkened room for several days, being forced—at the point of a bayonet—to stand perfectly still at “Attention,” or being deprived of food for a certain period. The punishments for the more serious offences, such as trying to escape, striking one of the guards, or refusing to work, were much more severe. For failing to obey the numerous rules and orders some one was sure to be getting it hot all the time.

When it was found that a prisoner refused to work for the Germans—and the majority refused at first—the man would be taken out and a heavy sack of bricks tied upon his back. He would then be forced to march up and down a steep hill at the point of a bayonet. If he stumbled or became exhausted, he would be prodded with the point of a bayonet and forced to continue until he consented to do the work which had been assigned to

him, or until he fainted under the strain. Upon recovery from the faint the same treatment would be continued until the man in sheer desperation consented to work.

While in Giessen I heard that several prisoners had been shot for attempting to escape and for committing other offences against their captors.

One of the worst forms of punishment was to force the unfortunate prisoners to stand for a certain time in front of hot fires till their faces and bodies became scorched with the intense heat. I saw several of the men who had undergone this form of punishment and their faces and bodies were in a pitiable condition from the burns that they had received.

## XXV

The food we received was as bad as it possibly could have been. During the whole time I was in Giessen the only food that was served to us was black bread and soup. No proper conception of how bad it really was can be gained from a mere description. We got the same fare continually. On some mornings we would be fortunate, however, and receive a cup of the now famous acorn coffee. Later, a piece of black bread would be



thrown to us. At noon we received a bowl of the most horrible concoction which the Germans called soup. From what it was made I do not know. Sometimes there would be a small piece of meat in the bowl—horse flesh, we felt sure. The soup was vile and evil-smelling and as it was very unpalatable as well very few of us ate it. At night we would receive another piece of black bread. The manner in which this bread was given to us was typically German. At a certain hour we would take our allotted places in the huts and a German soldier would walk through carrying upon his arm a basket containing portions of the bread. As he walked past he would throw each of us a piece of bread just as food is thrown to wild animals. Living on this we were always hungry. In the hut hospital in which I spent most of the time, the food was just as bad. No allowance at all was made for the unfortunate fellows who were in poor health, or so sick as to be unable to eat the prison fare. They had to eat it or starve.

Some of the British and Canadian prisoners were fortunate in receiving parcels of food from their relatives at home and from various societies in England and Canada. The Red Cross and societies formed to aid British prisoners were very



active. One of the branches of the Red Cross in Switzerland occasionally sent a quantity of white bread into the camp. This was at once swallowed up and if one were fortunate enough to secure even a small piece he felt lucky. We usually gave some of this bread to the men who were sick. It seemed queer to us that the Germans allowed the prisoners to receive parcels, but strange though it sounds, most of the parcels that were sent to British prisoners actually reached the men for whom they were intended.

If I were to write for ever upon this subject, it would be impossible for me to make people realize what those parcels meant to the prisoners. How the boys looked forward to them! How they appreciated them and blessed the kindness that prompted people to send them.

Of course, we did not all receive parcels. I received none, but that is easily accounted for. I had been reported as "Missing" and nobody knew where I was or even if I were alive. The boys who were fortunate enough to receive parcels always shared them as far as possible with the rest of us. The spirit of sacrifice and utter unselfishness which exists among soldiers was never better illustrated than in that prison camp.

When I say that those parcels of food were practically all that kept us from starvation, some little idea of our need for food can be gathered.

## XXVI

The hatred that the Germans had for everything British was at its height at this time and we Canadians and British suffered accordingly. The camp officers and non-coms. seemed to have but one set purpose—to treat the hated “Englanders” as badly as they could and make their existence almost unbearable. Of course, the prisoners of other nationalities did not receive good treatment, but the venom with which the British were treated was marked. The German officers did not deny this; in fact, many of them took the trouble to explain to us why we received worse treatment than the rest. I have heard German officers say words to the following effect when addressing a group of British prisoners: “You swine Englanders, you are not as the Russians, the Belgians or the French. They were forced to come to fight against us. You came of your own free will; you volunteered. Now, you can suffer the consequences.” Well, we certainly did suffer the consequences. The prisoners of other nationalities

were allowed to hold concerts and entertainments and gather together in groups, but never the British.

The worst feature of being a prisoner of war in Germany is the suspense under which you are forced to live. The monotony of it all! The feeling of never knowing what minute may be one's last! Living in the hands of enemies, surrounded by men who hated us, who would think nothing of ending our lives, and hearing nothing of what was going on in the outside world (for in a German prison camp it seems as though one were living in a place apart from the rest of the earth) began to tell upon our minds. I saw numbers of men whose hair had turned white, who became absolute physical and mental wrecks as a result of their stay in captivity.

The monotony of it all and the strain of the hard work told on the prisoners and they became moody and queer. It was a common sight in the camp to see a group sitting around not saying a word or uttering a sound—just sitting there, brooding silently. This condition was more noticeable among the men who accepted this fate as inevitable and saw no hope. Many of them became mentally unhinged by reason of getting

into such a low, depressed frame of mind. And no wonder. The life was enough to unhinge the soundest brain.

## XXVII

I happened to be a prisoner in Giessen at the time that Sir Roger Casement, the Irish traitor, tried to raise a regiment among the Irish prisoners in Germany to fight against the Allies. Of the propaganda that Casement spread throughout Germany and of the traitorous work that he accomplished in Ireland, I know but little; but I do know of the reception his agents received in Giessen. Casement did not visit Giessen in person, but he sent several of his agents to the camp to spread propaganda among us and to offer the Irish prisoners certain inducements to fight for Germany.

These agents told us that a regiment had been formed in Germany, composed of Irishmen who wished to throw off the yoke of English tyranny and fight in the ranks of Germany.

The regiment had been named the "Irish Legion." (We at once changed the name to the "Kaiser's Own," and by that name it was afterwards known among the prisoners.) Volunteers

were called for from among the Irish prisoners to join the regiment. They were told that each man who joined would wear a distinctive green uniform (I guess the Germans thought that green would appeal to the Irish), and after a certain period would be sent to the Eastern Front. It was pointed out that the regiment would not be called upon to serve on the Western Front where there would be danger of capture by other British or Irish regiments, but would serve only against the Russians. When the war was over—with Germany victorious—the survivors of the regiment were each to receive one thousand dollars and free transportation to the United States of America. (Very pleasant plans the Germans had formed for the people of America.) With all these inducements offered and, best of all, with a chance to get away from the prison camp, it is a wonderful tribute to the loyalty of the Irish, to be able to say that from the hundreds of Irish prisoners in Giessen Camp, only seventeen volunteered to join the “Kaiser’s Own.”

About a week afterwards these seventeen men were called out, but in the meantime the other Irish prisoners had heard all about it, so it was not surprising that the seventeen were unfit for



service in the "Kaiser's Own," or for that matter in anybody else's own. The other Irishmen in the camp had seen to that.

## XXVIII

If we were on good behaviour, and not serving any punishment, we were allowed to send and to receive mail. Each prisoner was permitted to send two letters and four postcards each month. The letters had to be very short and no information, whatsoever, could be given regarding conditions either in camp or in Germany. All the mail was strictly censored and if a prisoner wrote anything derogatory to the Germans, the letter or card was destroyed. If, however, we wrote that we were being treated well, and that conditions were favourable, there was every probability of our mail being forwarded. Moreover, we did not wish to worry our relatives and friends at home, by recounting tales of our sufferings. For these two reasons, we invariably wrote news which would please the Germans and appear cheerful to the home folks.

Most of the mail that was sent into the camp reached the men for whom it was intended, but only after it had passed a strict examination by



the censor. Frequently whole pages of letters would be cut out, or blotted over to make reading impossible. Still for these scant shreds of news we were able to get through the mail we were deeply grateful. As the boys shared their parcels so they shared their mail. A letter from the home town would be read by dozens of the boys, each one trying to imagine the letter had been written to himself.

## CHAPTER IV

# GETTING OUT OF IT



## CHAPTER IV

### GETTING OUT OF IT

#### I

Time passed slowly but surely and the weary months dragged along somehow. I had been a prisoner of war for several months when a rumour reached the camp that there was to be an exchange of incapacitated British prisoners. The Britishers immediately became greatly excited and began to wonder who would be picked out and sent home. At first we did not really believe the news. Perhaps many of us were afraid to as we did not wish to raise false hopes only to have them rudely dashed to the ground later. An anxious week passed, at the end of which time, however, the rumour had become an established fact. We knew then that some lucky ones were really to go back to England. It was humorous, it was exciting, it was pitiful to see the way some of the poor boys acted. Men who were just slightly wounded in the legs

at once became hopeless cripples quite unable to walk. Men wounded in the arm at once developed an arm that was paralyzed for life. Men acted deaf, and half blind and anything they could contrive, all in the hope that they would be picked out as incapacitated, placed on the exchange list and sent to that Mecca of a soldier's dreams—Blighty.

My leg was badly crippled at the time. The limb was five inches short and my foot completely paralyzed, so I thought that I, at least, stood a good chance of being exchanged. A few days before the first men were called out for examination I happened to be talking to one of the German guards. He was a very old man, a member of the Landsturm. From previous talks I had with him I gathered that he was well educated, as he spoke English easily. He and I almost became friends—if that were possible with a German—and often talked of the war and its possible outcome. "How long would it all last?" had been our eternal topic. He used to pass me as I stood on my crutches; sometimes he would stop, pat me on the head and say, "Mein kleiner Engländer, it is too bad that you are crippled so, you are so young. Only twenty years old and

Kaput. Why did you not stay at home instead of coming over to fight?"

This day, however, we did not talk of the war. I wanted to know all about the coming exchange of prisoners; who would be picked out? how many would be chosen? when the exchange would be made? how? and where? I must have asked him dozens of questions in a few seconds, one question after another and never waiting for a reply.

I firmly believe that it is to him I owe my freedom, for it was he who gave me the idea which led eventually to my exchange. He told me that even though a man were disabled, crippled and unable again to enter the fighting his repatriation was not sure. If a prisoner showed any sign of possessing intelligence so that the German officers thought he would be of service to his own country after exchange, as a clerk or instructor, or be used by his own country in any military capacity, or that he could even carry back any information whatsoever, then he would *not* be exchanged. I felt dismayed and thought that my chances of being placed on the exchange list were very slim.

Then the great idea came. I would pretend that I was insane; I would convince the Germans that I would not be of the slightest service either to my



own country or to them. I was very fortunate, as I had a great many things in my favour which helped me out in playing the part. At the time I looked very young, but the youthfulness of my appearance was added to greatly by reason of the very long hair that I had. During the whole time I was a prisoner my hair had not been cut. In addition to this had I not been wounded in the head? This fact I believed would help me out. It certainly did.

Together with a number of other wounded prisoners, I was called out one morning for examination and had to face a group of German officers and doctors. First, my wounds were examined. No doubt they soon saw that I was disabled as I was not detained long by the doctors. Then I was passed on to the officers and put through a regular "Third Degree" of questioning. They asked me about Canada, America, England, France; about our Armies; about the movements of our troops, the doings of my regiment, and a number of other questions impossible to recall. At every question I just shook my head and gave them to understand that I did not know. During the whole time I was being examined I wore a vacant look in my eyes and stared in

bewildered fashion at the doctors and officers, thus giving them the impression that I knew nothing and that I would never again know anything. For two weeks I was examined and questioned every morning by a different group of doctors and officers, but I always played the same part—that of a feeble-minded young boy, who was practically insane. How I managed it I do not know.

When I returned to England I had the great honour of speaking to the King. He asked me how I managed to play the part. Upon my return to Canada, I was visited by our Governor-General, then the Duke of Connaught, who also asked me the same thing. Everyone wants to know, yet I hardly know myself. It was a hard part to play, the hardest task I have ever had in my life, but it was worth it. It meant my freedom.

Sometimes, when I was being examined, I almost broke down and felt that it would be impossible to continue and that I would never convince the Germans of my derangement. At those moments I would think of home, of my country, of my own people, of what my freedom would mean, of how wonderful it would be to leave the prison camp. To leave it and its horrors

behind me for ever! When I thought of these things, I took courage. I would grit my teeth and determine to see the thing through; I would play the part to the end, or die in the attempt. Death itself, I thought, would be preferable to staying in the prison camp after being so near to freedom.

If I were called upon to do the same thing to-day—living under present circumstances—I know that it would be absolutely impossible. There and at that time it was different. I was playing for big stakes—liberty. I had been living for months in Hell under the worst conditions, and I saw one big chance to get away from it all.

## II

I must have been successful, for at the end of the two weeks I was placed upon the exchange list and told that I was to be sent back to England. I could hardly restrain myself on hearing this. I feared to believe it in case something at the last moment would prevent me from getting away. It all seemed so wonderful that mere words fail to describe my feelings. I was indeed fortunate, as only a handful of us had been chosen from among the hundreds of incapacitated prisoners in the camp.

When it became definitely established that a few of us were to go home we were the most envied ones in the camp. I firmly believe that a number of the other poor prisoners would gladly have sacrificed a limb if the losing of it would have secured their freedom. I heard many of the boys make statements to that effect. I saw other boys go up to men who were blinded and also on the exchange list, take them by the hand and congratulate them on having lost their eyesight. For being blinded, they were going home.

### III

A few days afterwards we started on our way home. What a different journey it was from the previous one that we had taken through Germany. In spite of the fact that we were all badly crippled and wounded, we were in the very best of spirits. All were cheerful and happy at the prospect of being once again with our own people. At each of the different places at which we stopped during the homeward journey, we were again subjected to the abuse and curses of the German civilians. But we did not mind in the least. When they cursed us or threw stones at the train, we just laughed—yes, laughed. What did we care for

their abuse? It would soon be over now; we were going Home, Home, Home. The very wheels of the train, the noise of the engine, seemed to din that sacred word into our ears. On the way we crossed the Rhine again. This second time, I thought, "Will I ever cross this river again, and, if so, under what conditions?" I am still wondering.

Eventually, we came once again to Aix-la-Chapelle. There we were placed in a large concentration camp and found ourselves among hundreds of other British prisoners. These were men, also disabled and on the exchange list, who had been gathered from all the other prison camps of Germany. Altogether, there were about nine hundred of us, and we began to sing, to celebrate the fact that we would all soon be free.

Then came the hardest blow of all. We were informed that we were all to be re-examined, as from the nine hundred only three hundred were to be exchanged. The rest were to go back to the prison camps. It was pitiful to see how we received the news. Here we were, within sight of freedom, yet some of us would not reach it. We were all re-examined. When it came to my turn, I had to sustain the same part that I had



played at Giessen, as my records and medical history were in the hands of this new group of doctors.

To make a long story short I was again fortunate enough to "get away with it" and was once more placed on the exchange list with the lucky three hundred. But imagine the feelings of those poor unfortunate fellows who were rejected, and told they must again go back to the living Hell of the prison camp! It was pitiful to see them. They broke down and sobbed like children when they realized their fate. Many of them had travelled for days, from remote parts of Germany, thinking they were going home. At the last hour they were turned down and all their wonderful hopes dashed to earth. They went back sorrowing to the camps, many of them to stay more weary months.

#### IV

Just before we left Aix-la-Chapelle I noticed a young German sergeant passing by me and happened to glance at his shoulder strap. It bore the number 236. I grabbed the arm of one of the boys nearby, and exclaimed, "There goes one of the men belonging to the regiment that captured



me." The German evidently heard me, for he turned back and pointing to his shoulder strap, said, "You know the number, eh?" "Yes," I answered, "it was your regiment that fought against ours at Ypres." "So," he said, "well, I was at Ypres; perhaps I saw you." With that he passed on.

"Perhaps he saw me," I thought; "perhaps he is the one that shot me!"

## V

Later that night the lucky three hundred were sent across the border into Holland, and in that country were exchanged by the American Ambassador for three hundred Germans who had been sent back from England. Of these three hundred, twenty-two were Canadians, two native Indian soldiers, and the remainder British Tommies.

We never saw the Germans who had been sent back from England in exchange for us, but I cannot say we were sorry. Most of us had seen enough Germans to serve us for some time to come.

No sooner had we crossed the frontier into Holland than a number of British and American

newspapermen boarded the train and wanted to know all about the conditions in Germany. No doubt they got much more material and heard more stories than they could ever print. A representative of the British Government then took charge of us. He was continually questioned as to whether or not we were really free at last. One or another of the boys would go up to him and ask, "Mister, are we really out of Germany now?" or "Can the Germans get us back?" "Are we surely going to England?" and so on. He must have got tired of answering all these questions, for he stood up at last and, holding up his hand for silence, said, "Boys, you are free now; you are on your way home at last. The d——d Huns can never get you back. Your people at home are waiting for you; they expect you. The war will soon be over; the Allies are winning. Do not forget that Germany will have to suffer for everything she has done, especially for the manner in which she has treated you." With that he sat down. How we cheered! "Free at last!" Out of the power of the Huns! Going home at last! It seemed almost too good to be true. A little later we were given a good meal with sandwiches of white bread—the first that

many of us had seen for months—and English newspapers. What a different tale they told from the stories we had heard in Germany. At last I began to realize the true meaning and power of propaganda.

## VI

We only spent one day in Holland before being sent to England, but what a wonderful day it was! The Dutch people were kindness itself and showered us with gifts of good things. At Flushing we embarked on a Dutch vessel and soon found ourselves within sight of the shores of England. As we sailed up the Thames, the other vessels on the river—hundreds of them—gave us a royal welcome by blowing their sirens. The glad welcome was taken up by the factories on shore, which blew their whistles unceasingly. A great crowd had gathered to welcome us as we left the boat at Tilbury Docks, London.

We must have appeared a pitiful group of men as we walked, were carried, or led down the gang plank. All in rags and tatters, wearing parts of any old uniform or clothing we had picked up in the prison camps, and as dirty and disreputable a group of men as one could imagine. First a man

without an arm would descend; then one with a leg missing. Another would be carried down on a stretcher; another led along as he was blind. A wreck of a man who had been gassed stumbled down, followed by an orderly carrying a man who had lost both legs. So the pitiful procession went on.

The crowd had gathered to cheer us, but they could not. Women sobbed aloud; men blew their noses with great vigour. I do not think there was a dry eye in that whole great crowd. If the people could not cheer, we could and did. We cheered till we became hoarse. We were smashed up a little, but what did we care. We were Home! Happy, and in the best of spirits. The war was over for many of us; we would see no more fighting. We were *Home*.

From Tilbury we were sent to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth and there I remained for five weeks. During my stay I had the privilege of speaking to His Majesty King George, when he visited the hospital. As I was from Canada, the King seemed to show an especial interest in me, and as he shook my hand he said, "I am proud to meet you, my boy; I am always proud to meet a Canadian."

## VII

While convalescing in England, before returning to Canada, two months in all, I was in four Zeppelin raids. During three of the raids I was in London, and during the fourth in the Canadian Camp at Shorncliffe. Zeppelin raids are not pleasant, to say the least. When a bomb was dropped within a few hundred yards of where I was standing at Shorncliffe, I was not so confident that after all, the Germans had finished with me. When I heard that I was to return to Canada I felt sure that I should be in a submarine disaster. It seemed that I had experienced everything else that the Germans could offer in the way of excitement. They must have taken pity on me at last, for I escaped the submarines and returned to my home town, Toronto, in safety.

Can I ever forget my return? Never! There were about fifty of us on board the train—all returning from the war—as it pulled into the depot. When it stopped, I put my head out of the window and heard someone shout, "There he is." Yes, there I was, but not for long. I was literally lifted from the train and surrounded immediately by admiring relatives and friends. Of what happened during the next hour I have but hazy



recollections. I remember being "Welcomed Back," being kissed, and having my arm almost shaken off.

## VIII

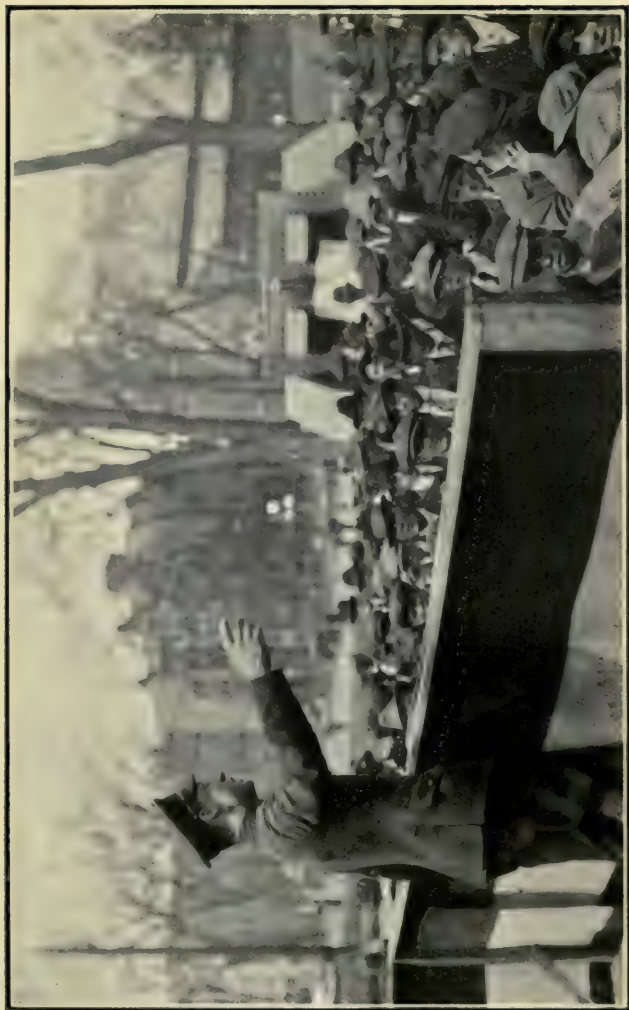
Thus I came back from the war. Later, I was placed in a hospital in Toronto and then began a series of the most wonderful operations that have ever been performed in Canada. It was necessary to have my thigh and ankle re-broken, and again set, this time in the proper manner. Then several operations had to be performed to re-join a number of nerves that had been deliberately severed by the Germans. This had all to be done—not because of the wounds that I had received—but to repair the diabolical work of the German surgeons, who had deliberately attempted to cripple me for life. The result of the operations performed by the Canadian doctors is simply marvellous. When I left Germany I was told that I would never be able to walk again. I had never dared to hope that I should ever walk again. I was lucky in that I came home alive. Now, however, I can walk almost as well as I did before becoming "A Guest of the Kaiser," and am not any worse physically than I was before enlisting. The skill of our doctors has fooled the Germans.



## IX

In my work, I am doing my best to fool them also. They thought when they sent me home that I could not be of any further use to the Allied cause; that I could never again retaliate.

My dearest wish now would be to return to Germany, visit the doctors who pronounced me practically insane and unfit for any further service, and say to them, "Well, my dear Huns, you thought that you had crippled me when you operated upon my wounded leg. Just look at it now. When you sent me home, you said that I would be of no further use. It is true that I was not able to fight against you in the field, but I can still 'hit back.' Perhaps the twelve hundred men that I recruited helped to drive your hordes back, and the seven million dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds that I sold, bought some of the bullets and shells that confirmed your defeat. Perhaps, also, the propaganda that I have spread, and am still spreading, throughout Canada and the United States, will help to defeat the insidious propaganda of your treacherous agents. Why, my dear Huns, you are always making mistakes. You said that America would not fight. Did she? Ask your soldiers, they know. You have said so



THE AUTHOR APPEALING FOR RECRUITS FOR THE AMERICAN TANK CORPS,  
WATERBURY, CONN., U.S.A.



many things and made so many mistakes that you must pay the price. I can still retaliate, yes, and will continue to do so until you *have* paid the price, for now, thank God, the victory is ours."

## X

As I conclude my story I learn that the war is ended at last. The victory for which we struggled through four long years has now crowned our efforts. In the darkest hours, through the darkest days, through the darkest years, the soldiers and the people of the Allied countries never lost hope, never lost confidence, but grimly struggled on through terrible suffering, supreme in their faith in a just and righteous God. The dark days are past; the sun shines once more through the clouds; for the strife, the killing, the horror and the suffering of war end, and peace returns to earth once more.

We—and I speak for those who were privileged to serve "Over There"—learned a great many lessons from the war, learned them oftentimes in a bitter manner and in a hard school, for "Active Service" is a hard school. The one that stands out above all others is the lesson of sacrifice.

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Sacrifice! Modern war calls for sacrifice. Think of the sacrifice that the boys made when they left home and loved ones to fight for the great cause. Think of the sacrifice made by the ones who stayed at home and waited—the mothers, wives, sisters, sweethearts, yes, and the fathers and brothers also. For we could not all go to the Front. We could not all go “over there” and play the part of a fighting man. Some were forced to stay at home. Yes, some who would have given all, just to be able to go. Over there we realized that—we *understood*.

Sometimes we felt sorry for those who were forced to stay behind. When we sailed away and saw the shores of Canada fading away in the distance, we felt that *we* were the lucky ones; *we* were the privileged ones, for were we not going to Europe to take part in the great adventure? Yes, we felt sorry for you at your desks, behind the counters, on the farms, everywhere, except with us.

Even at the Front we were sorry for you people at home. You were pitying us, sending us words of sympathy, telling of the hard conditions that we were so bravely enduring. Yet at the Front, in spite of the hardships, the horror and the

killing, we were learning and seeing the finer side of human nature. We were learning the meaning of sacrifice. Out there, facing death continually, men share everything. They give away their last rations, their last drop of water, their last cigarette, even give up their lives for their comrades. At the Front gone were the selfish interests that weighed men down in time of peace.

A new era is coming. We have been through the fire; we have been through Hell and most of us have come out the better for it.

Yet the soldiers alone did not win the war. The soldiers only won the battles. The nations won the war. The people at home were called upon to help, called upon to back up the boys at the Front, and right nobly they responded.

Since my return I have been asked many times if I were sorry that I went to the Front. Sorry? No! no! a thousand times no! Like thousands of others I had some trying experiences over there and I came back slightly smashed up, but in spite of it all I still feel, as I did in 1914, that I am the most privileged person in the world, simply because I was allowed to go.

The experiences I have had, the lessons I learned while on active service are priceless to me.



I have learned to know and to love *real* men; I have learned of the great brotherhood of man; and I learned the great lesson of sacrifice.

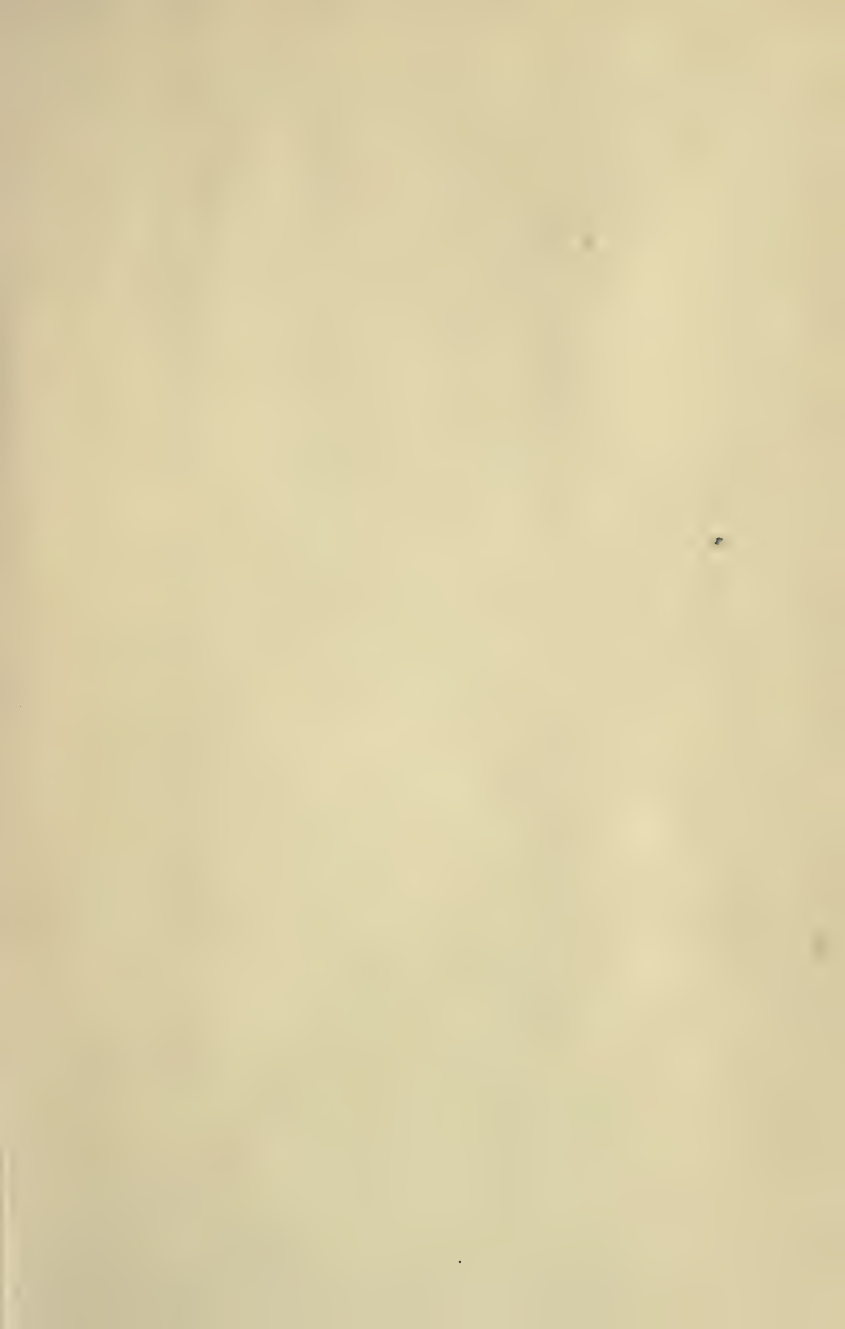
I can now enjoy that feeling of quiet satisfaction which comes of knowing that when the call came I went. But after all I feel that I only did my duty. What soldier could ask for more?











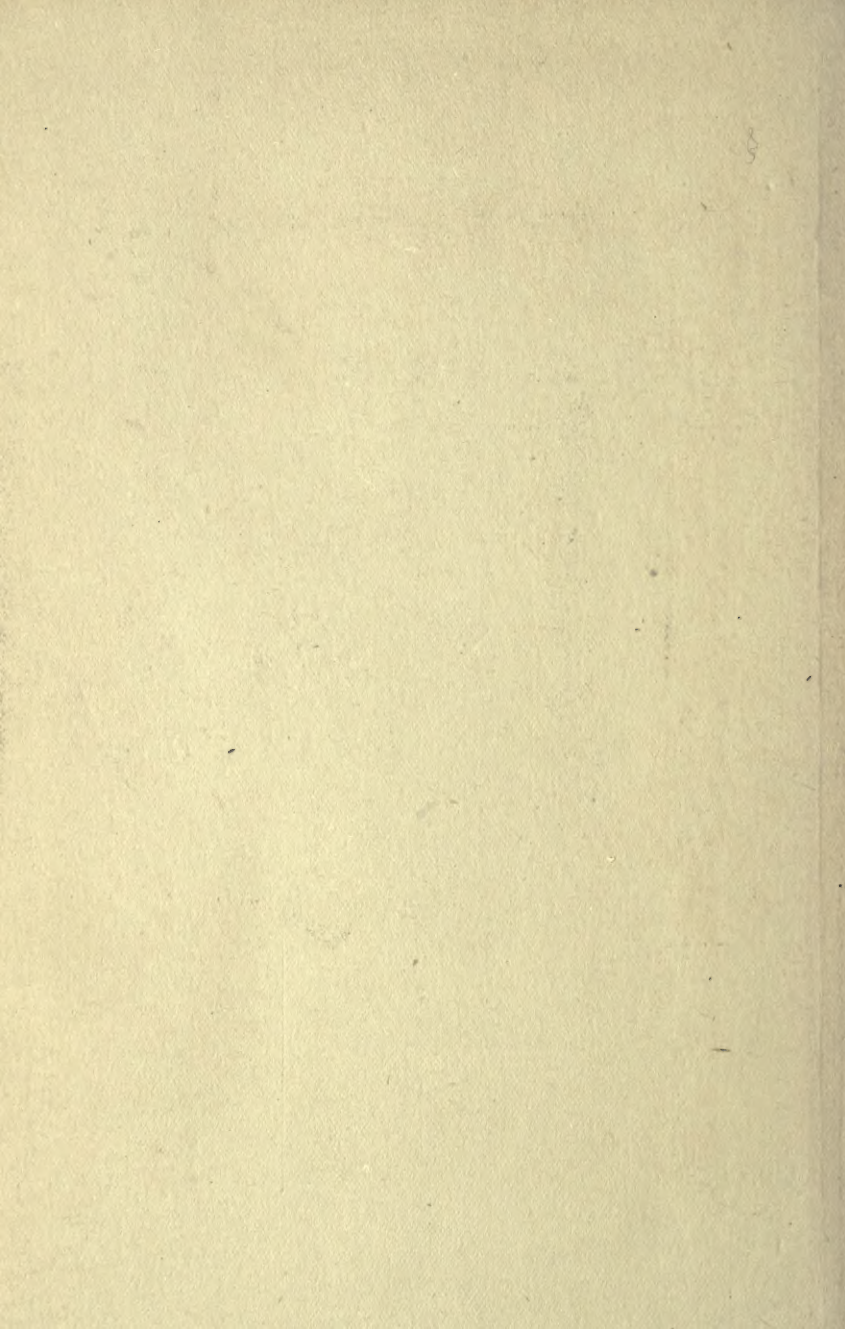












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Gibbons, Arthur  
A guest of the Kaiser.

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